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HISTORY of Germany Since 1789

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Preface to the English Edition

The history of Germany here presented in English was written between 1953 and 1957. Since the completion of the German text new material has appeared, some of which has been taken account of in the English edition. Nevertheless it is impossible to hide when – in the intellectual climate of which decade – a book was written. Nor are all the much discussed new contributions to recent German history of real importance.

For example, the question of who set fire to the Berlin Reichstag in 1933 is a minor problem, of interest more to the detective or the incendiary specialist than to the historian. Nevertheless, I have revised my original account of the affair in the light of the most recent research.

Nothing has come to light or can ever come to light that will substantially change the historian's first verdict on the launching of the Second World War. The course of events was public from the beginning, unique in its simplicity. This fact cannot be altered by any secret document which those who claim that Hitler was innocent, or only partially guilty, hope to find when the British and French archives are eventually opened. Anyone who expects something of that kind merely shows that he ridiculously overestimates the significance of a single document, of a word spoken or written at some time or other, compared with the mass of clearly available evidence as to cause and effect; either because he has learnt no historical method or – which is probably more often the case – because he uses his intelligence to serve his own doubtful purpose. The casuistry of A. J. P. Taylor's *Origins of the Second World War* deserves only a short, not very respectful refutation which I have tried to give elsewhere. The follies of the

American, Hoggan, who transformed Hitler into a prince of peace and benefactor of mankind deserves no refutation. It may be regrettable but it is not surprising that Anglo-Saxon writers, because of stupidity or enjoyment of a paradox, should irresponsibly stab in the back those Germans who are striving to spread the truth.

Anyway, no one has ever claimed that Hitler had wanted or planned exactly the war that he got in the end. What he wanted, what his ideas on nature, man, state and race inevitably produced was war or ventures which could not be pursued without war. War is an abstract noun; any real war will always differ from the idea. If there is some truth in what Taylor says about Hitler's opportunism, about the way in which he seized chances that surprised even him, it does not in any way disprove the bellicose character of Hitler's state and Hitler's policy. Hitler really wanted to murder the European Jews and to destroy Czechoslovakia and Poland, and he had always said so. He had no idea when and how he would do it, or how far he would succeed. Politicians, says Taylor, act from one day to the next, from one year to the next; their improvisations are what historians later mistake for a grand design. The observation is not without wit and may serve to correct excessively narrow interpretations. Only it happens to apply to no person less than to this one. 'I admire your Führer', a French soldier said to me in 1940. 'I must admire him because he has done everything that he promised himself he would do.' This simple boy saw the issue more clearly than our sophisticated historical philosopher. By and large I do not think that my account of Adolf Hitler's twelve years is out of date, however many new little bits of research, especially German research, have since contributed towards the completion of the whole horrible mosaic.

If anything it was the chapters on the period of the Kaiser and the First World War that needed revision. Since they were written undeniably important new material has been published on those periods, intelligent general works in which the emphasis is put in a different place – such as Theodor Schieder's *Das Deutsche Kaiserreich von 1871 als Nationalstaat* or Michael Balfour's *The*

Kaiser and his Times – as well as the results of impressive specialized research. Among the latter are Gerhard Ritter's examination of the *Schlieffen-Plan*, Günther Zmarzlik's *Bethmann Hollweg als Reichskanzler*, Morsey's and Matthias' great volumes on the *Interfraktionelle Ausschuss* and the *Regierung des Prinzen Max von Baden*, but above all Fritz Fischer's hotly debated *Der Griff nach der Weltmacht*. Not that these publications upset accepted views and replaced them by new ones. This is unlikely to happen in relation to events about which we have long had thousands of documents and hundreds of books of every kind and quality; events which, moreover, in contrast to eighteenth-century policy, were public from the start. Any intelligent newspaper reader could see from the headlines what the game was in 1914 or 1917 while it was being played. It remained for research, old and new, to confirm, to emphasize and to qualify in this or that respect what had always been known. We have always known that, in spite of the antiquated structure of the constitution, the importance of the Reichstag grew continuously under William II, that the Chancellors came to depend a little on parliament, a state of affairs which became noticeably more marked during the war; that the spontaneous establishment of such bodies as the Inter-party Committee during the reign of William II prepared the way for the Republic or at least for a more parliamentary form of constitution. We have always known what forces resisted this process and why, and how it was that it did not reach its goal in time. As regards German diplomacy every schoolboy has known since 1919, or should have known, that in June 1914 it was fully conscious of the possibility or even the likelihood of a European war. One could not help but know this, unless one was prepared to believe that Bethmann and his advisers were complete idiots, which they were clearly not. Equally well known were the fantastic war aims of various substantial sections of German society and how these received whole-hearted approval from the military leaders and half-hearted approval from the government. How could it have been otherwise? These issues were discussed in the press and in public.

Fischer has diligently collected the evidence of a conscious

responsibility of German diplomacy for the outbreak of the First World War and has shown the continuity of German war aims during the four years of the war, tracing them back to the time before the war and following them up to Hitler's conquests. His book is an impressive testimony of national self-criticism, of the kind which German academic historians of the inter-war period unfortunately failed to produce. But the book is one sided and inadequate. It knows nothing of the dialectic of events, of the effect of pressure and counter-pressure. It completely ignores the war aims of the Entente. It does not ask whether Germany during the four war years could have had a *status quo ante* peace – a point which is far from certain – nor to what extent the most expansionist aims arose from the dim awareness of the fact that in any case there could be no return to 1914. Nor does the book give sufficient weight to the inter-play between war aims and internal German constitutional and social conflicts. There is no need to complicate simple things; the start of Hitler's war is a simple story. On the other hand one must not simplify complicated issues. I personally still cannot see any direct, conscious sequence of cause and effect between the German policy of expansion before 1914 and German behaviour during the July crisis of that year. Naturally there is a connection, but it is subconscious and repressed. It has nothing of the highly conscious, ideological shamelessness of 1939. Hitler acted in complete freedom, the Kaiser under semi-blind, semi-desperate constraint; anyone who fails to see this difference confuses the issue instead of clarifying it.

As it happens Fischer's view has been corrected or balanced by other books which appeared at the same time. Ritter's *Schlieffen-Plan* emphasizes the terrible pressure of time under which the German diplomats were acting in the last days of July; their initial mistake having been to subordinate their policy to the ideas of a politically ignorant and innocent strategist who, if it came to war, was prepared to have only the one that he had planned in advance, day by day, hour by hour. The decisive influence of the army in 1914, and its complete lack of influence in 1939, confirm that the two occasions were profoundly different. The attempts, though

unsuccessful, clumsy and half-hearted, to eliminate one of the opponents in the war and to achieve a partial peace – attempts which Fischer has almost ignored – have been described by Egmont Zechlin. Hantsch's new biography of the Austrian Foreign Minister, Berchthold, does not give us the picture of a belligerent imperialist but of a long-standing 'appeaser' who in 1914 – too late? – adopted a daringly stubborn attitude, just because he had *not* taken it for so long, and was reputed at home to favour peace without honour; this would represent a parallel, though the only one, between the tired Habsburg grand seigneur and the English bourgeois, Neville Chamberlain. Although the arguments and counter-arguments, the quotations and counter-quotations of recent years may have increased our knowledge of the period of William II, Bethmann and Ludendorff, they have not really altered it.

What is new, however, is what has happened since this book was written and what at the time I wisely refrained from predicting. The frontier between 'history' and 'the present' is indefinable. 'The dense web of the fortunes of man is woven without a void', says Lord Acton. In the German edition the events after 1945 were only briefly referred to; the 'post-war period' was that year, that day. Since then the feeling has grown that we no longer live in a post-war period, that the conditions and tensions which followed almost immediately on Hitler's war, those of the Cold War or East-West conflict, have changed. At any rate their origins lie sufficiently far back in the past to make it possible to recount them. The same also applies to the German components of this development, the foundation and development of the Federal Republic, the hardening of the accidental military frontiers of 1945 into the 'two German states'. Therefore I have rewritten the last chapter and tried to tell a story which can, of course, only end in questions. The Bonn Republic has already lasted longer than the Weimar one and still survives. Indeed the forms created by the East-West conflict have survived in Germany more markedly than anywhere else. Connected with this is the fact that Germany's existence since 1945, in spite of the country's tremendous economic recovery, in spite of the prompt

re-emergence of a considerable German military power, has in the main been passive. Passive even if it were true, as an American politician once said, that American foreign policy was determined, for eight years by the German Chancellor, for in that case Adenauer decided or helped to decide the foreign policy of America, not of Germany. German foreign policy was completely dependent on that of America on the one hand and on that of Russia on the other. What we are dealing with in these twenty years is not the history of an independent centre of energy but of a province or of two provinces, one of which became rich without becoming powerful. Maybe it will translate its wealth into active power again one day. It would then cease to be a province and our last chapter would be given the conclusion which it lacks today.

However 'provincial' post-war Germany was, its fate was passively tied up with that of the world. The historian really needs to write the history of the world when writing the history of Germany after 1945; this, however, would miss our purpose. In a history of the world of the last twenty years, Germany deserves only a small place. Therefore this story becomes very fragmentary towards the end. It deals only with a narrow sector of world events, the German one, and assumes that all the rest, which is the main part, is known. Equally it must break off *infectis rebus*, losing itself in the undecided issues of the moment.

G.M.

Part One

► Cardinal Factors in German History

The genius of Europe has given much to the world: things good and evil, generally things that are both good and evil – among them the state and the nation. Elsewhere, in Asia and in Africa, nations and states did not exist in the past. They are being produced and reproduced there today, and the forms invented by Europe are used as weapons against Europe. This is not unjust or humiliating provided we do not misunderstand it.

Ever since society began to take shape in Europe the Continent has been divided into nations: there has been one European civilization but many nations. The identity of Europe may be denied because there have always been different forces at work and many links with non-European civilizations such as Islam. But similar arguments can be used to deny the existence of nations. Let us not deny the obvious: as the embodiment of fruitful communities, as a force which explored the earth and gave continents and islands names which they still possess, as the main-spring of the world today, there has been an entity called Europe – Europe with its Catholic religion, its nobles and bourgeoisie, its towns and medieval estates, its crusades and voyages of discovery, its science, its art, its music and its politics.

But from the beginning there was something more than a great Christian Europe. The notion that this Europe was destroyed by the nations is a myth. The society that gradually emerged from the dark ages of the post-Roman era was already divided into nations, and although the complete development of the nation-state was still to come, England and France at least were definitely moving towards the nation-state as early as the thirteenth century. But states and nations remained interdependent; their rivalries,

their friendships and their entities made Europe great. Later, when the situation became critical and times changed, they brought Europe to self-destruction, but it often happens in history that the forces that make us grow also destroy us. Originally the concepts of Europe, state and nation did not conflict; they presupposed each other. Even the nationalism of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was a highly international affair. Different nationalisms stimulated and aped each other using the same words in the same cause. Even the worst nationalism with which people tried to destroy and deny Europe proved nothing against Europe, for it was a European disease.

The history of each European nation is unique, but related and similar to the histories of the others. All nations have been in close friendly or hostile contact and have affected each other: Germans and Italians, Italians and Spaniards, Spaniards and Frenchmen, Englishmen and Frenchmen, Englishmen and Spaniards, Frenchmen and Germans, Scandinavians and Germans and Englishmen, Germans and Poles and Czechs and South Slavs and Hungarians. No particular national history can serve as a model in the sense that one might regret that others did not take the same course.

Historians have often regretted that in the Middle Ages Germany and Italy did not become nation-states like France, that in Germany the idea of the Empire prevented such a development. But everything depends on everything else. Who can say whether France could have become a nation-state if Germany had become one early? Nations have assumed certain forms because others did not. Even if one admits – as I think one must – that Britain's history has been happier than that of the continental peoples, one must point out that Britain itself was able to be happily different only because the Continent was not like Britain.

Unique too has been the fate of the ethnic group which the God of History placed in the centre of Europe, unique but at the same time tied closely to that of other ethnic groups, great and small.

The student of the history of the German nation easily gets an impression of restless oscillation between extremes. At times there is a wide gap between idea and reality, as in the medieval Empire

when German kings and self-styled Roman Emperors fought for a fantastic *imperium* extending far beyond linguistic frontiers while Germany disintegrated into countless little territorial states; at other times the nation indulges in a long orgy of self-destruction, as during the Thirty Years War. At times Germans reach the highest spiritual heights ever scaled by men, even though public life is dominated by a dreary mediocrity. Disinterest in politics gives way to hectic political activity, variety to complete uniformity; from prostration Germany rises to aggression, collapses again into chaos and then with incredible speed recovers a new and hectic prosperity. It can be receptive, cosmopolitan, admiring of things foreign; at other times it despises and rejects everything foreign and seeks salvation in the exaggerated cultivation of its national characteristics. At times the Germans seem a philosophical people, at others the most practical and most materialist; at times the most patient and peaceful, at others the most domineering and brutal. Their own philosopher, Nietzsche, called them the '*Täusche-Volk*'* because time after time they have surprised the world by things least expected of them.

It has often been said that Germany, unlike more fortunate countries, has no natural frontiers. There is something in this claim, although it must at once be qualified. It would credit Nature with too much political foresight to believe that by means of oceans, mountains and rivers she neatly partitioned Europe into regions in which the wandering nations could assemble and find permanent homes. 'The Rhine, Germany's river, not Germany's frontier,' wrote Ernst Moritz Arndt, and this is true to the extent that nobody can say why on earth a river should be a frontier; that mountains are not necessarily political frontiers can be seen by a glance at the maps of North America, Switzerland or Austria. The sea in particular has always been a line which it was a temptation to cross, to trade, to colonize, to conquer and to found empires, rather than a frontier. States are historical structures that have almost nothing to do with the Will of Nature. It was not the Will of Nature that Portugal should remain independent but not Catalonia or Brittany; that Britain should become a world power

*A pun on *deutsch* (German) and *täuschen* (to deceive) (Tr.).

instead of remaining a Roman or a French province. The disappearance of the great city leagues of the Middle Ages, the Lombard and the Rhenish, and the development of a much smaller and weaker league on the Lake of Lucerne into the Swiss nation-state had nothing to do with natural frontiers. The French were the first to confuse the facts of history with the facts of nature and in the seventeen-nineties began to speak of the natural frontiers of their republic; they paid dearly for it. Later the Americans decided that it was the Will of Nature that the whole of the North American continent should belong to them. They managed to establish their claim against the unfortunate Red Indians, Spain and Mexico. But the frontier between the United States and Canada is artificial from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and this frontier the Americans have respected, not because it was natural but because it was politically right. Nature has not prescribed to any state how great or small it should be.

What then do we mean when we say that Germany has no natural frontiers? Only this: that in its frontiers, or lack of frontiers, it differs somewhat from other states. Britain is surrounded by water. France has the Atlantic to the west, mountains and sea to the south and a few mountains to the south-east – all of which the French have crossed several times; to the north and the north-east the country is open. Germany has mountains to the south, sea to the north, open country to the east and west; that is the whole difference. It is centrally situated like Poland, Persia and other countries. There is no need to maintain that Germany is mysteriously destined to lack frontiers because of its central position.

It lies midway between Latins and Slavs, and this factor has indeed been of great importance for the Germans. At certain times the Germans were less civilized than their Latin neighbours. Their society developed later and more slowly. European civilization spread from the west and the south to the east and the north, with the result that in the Middle Ages western and southern Germany showed more developed forms of economic, political and intellectual life than eastern Germany. But the latinized West did not keep its slight lead. At the height of the Middle Ages

Cologne was as much a capital of Christianity as Paris, and the Hohenstaufen court as much a centre of civilization as the Capetian. If much later the Germans again fell behind their western neighbours, if in the seventeenth, eighteenth and even in the nineteenth century they were still in a sense imitating the more advanced West, the explanation is not to be sought in their barbaric origins, which went no further back than those of the British. The explanation lies in more recent economic, political and intellectual developments. On rare occasions the Germans were even ahead of their Latin neighbours. By and large the two were well balanced and if there were conflicts, such as those between the Popes and the German Emperors, they arose from the very fact of a common civilization.

In the East the position was different. On the whole – not always and not everywhere – the Germans were more civilized than the Slavs. Here they were both threatened and themselves threatened others. Until the late Middle Ages they were confronted by something fundamentally alien, and even more recently by something intrinsically different. We need not go into the question of what a race is. Races tend to mix, particularly in places where they meet and fight, and the Germans mixed with the Slavs in the East long after they had amalgamated with the conquered Celts in the South. When we speak of the German and Slav races we are not referring to biological entities, but to historic forces divided by language, custom and possibly religion. Such forces clashed in the East, one trying to expand at the expense of the other. But German penetration in the East consisted more of peaceful settlement and less of racial and religious struggles than Slav and German nationalism was later prepared to admit. German colonists were in demand in Poland and Bohemia; brutal oppression such as that of the heathen 'Prussians' was the exception and not the rule. Yet the fluid situation in the East greatly influenced the character of the Germans as a nation. In more recent times Germany's two eastern states in particular, Austria and Prussia, were affected by the nature of their contact with the Slavs. As a result there was a difference between them and landlocked Germany, which lacked such contacts and looked to the West.

Here are some of the cardinal factors in German history: the comparative unimportance of Germany's sea communications; the extent of its overland communications in the west, the east and the south-east; and the proximity of the Slavs. After history had once made these factors no historical activity could change them.

The Empire, later called the Roman Empire, later still the Holy Roman Empire and finally the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation, was important in the history of Germany not for what it achieved – its practical substance never amounted to very much – but for two reasons. First, because it was an obstacle and so generated positive reactions and developments, and secondly because it was the basis for a legend, an idea and a memory. (These points do not apply to the Frankish Kingdom whose ruler, Charlemagne, had the title of Roman Emperor bestowed upon himself. At that time there were no Germans or Frenchmen.)

As early as the Ottonian period the empire had its centre of gravity in Germany. The situation remained the same ever after, however far-flung and ill-defined the frontiers of the Empire were in the south and west, and however Christian and universal the idea became. Reality always fell short of the idea, approaching it only at brief moments. In the Middle Ages there could be no Caesars in the style of Augustus; nor could there be presidents of a free community of Christian peoples. Europe was too vast, too fragmented and soon also too deeply divided between nationalities. What the phantasmagoria of the Empire produced was a curiously tense, often unhappy liaison between Germany and Italy. It was also responsible for the division of Germany into territories whose rulers in the end acquired and represented such political reality as there was. The Emperor was either the greatest territorial lord or nobody at all. The Empire should have been a beautiful dome to the edifice formed by the countries of the Christian world. In the end it was only a brittle German political complex which barely managed to serve as a bridge. Other nations gradually developed towards unity; Germany, which had begun with the Empire, ended up with indissoluble particularism. When the idea and practice of the modern state spread from Italy, Spain, France,

and Britain, there was no nascent central power in Germany to benefit. It was therefore the territorial princes who benefited; and such the situation remained until well into the nineteenth century.

This was not altogether a misfortune; all nations need not take the same road. Germany took a different road, and one that led past strange places. At the beginning of our story, let us say in 1789, the Empire was made up of 1,789 territories, of which some were independent states and European powers, but most just consisted of a few castles and villages.

Germany's political multiformity has nothing to do with its nature and geography, or with its historical beginnings. It is true that there is great regional variety; the German who feels himself at home in the Black Forest, on the Main or the Neckar or in the Alps, will feel a stranger on the Lüneburg Heath. But the same is also true of the old provinces of France, like Provence and Brittany. Germany has no greater variety of scenery and climate than other European countries. It has been said that one of the causes of the division of Germany was the Roman *limes*, the fact that for hundreds of years the Romans occupied the country south of the Danube and west of the Rhine, whereas they were soon forced to abandon the region between the northern Rhine and the Elbe, and never got beyond the Elbe. I cannot persuade myself to regard this as a reason for the German political system in more recent times. The Roman occupation was really more likely to split the country in half than to divide it into 1,789 principalities. The fact that the Romans had once been there may well have made a difference for a long time, but it cannot make a permanent difference. Nor were the various tribal groups in which the Teutons entered history as important for the development of Germany's political system as even the Constitution of 1919 would suggest. The old duchies had disappeared early. The territorial princes who emerged in the course of the Middle Ages had originally been servants of the king and feudal lords, holders of numerous offices and beneficiaries of many feudal privileges which they gradually transformed into territorial overlordships vested in their persons and families. In the case of Bavaria territorial rule coincided with part of the old tribal region; elsewhere,

for example in Hesse and Saxony, little remained of the old tribal character but the high-sounding name. In modern times the largest principality, Prussia, was named after an exterminated heathen tribe. Even the names of the majority indicated that they were feudal domains with a castle or the ruler's place of residence as their centre. This was not something that was there at the beginning; it is a historical development. The Austrians were Bavarians by descent; history, and modern history at that, has made them into something different.

But why then the political division of Germany? The historian is often unable to distinguish cause from effect. He can only say that this is what happened and therefore it happened in this way. Description and explanation become one. The reason for an event lies in the event itself. We are merely rearranging words if we say, for example, that something in the Germans drove them towards political multiformity and made them reproduce the divisions of their old tribal organization in completely changed circumstances. As far as the human, personal aspect goes the type of the aggressive politician is later found among the princes and not among the representatives of the Empire. Master politicians like Maurice of Saxony, Maximilian I of Bavaria or Frederick William of Brandenburg did not serve the idea of the Empire. The only politician of genius who for a time had great plans for the Empire, Wallenstein, regarded himself as the representative of the Austrian territorial power and later as a ruler in his own right. The question then would be why the most intelligent political energy was absorbed by the principalities. To this there is only one answer: the Empire was always more a figment of the imagination than a reality, and after the fall of the Hohenstaufen it became a mere dream. But in a dream there is no place for *Realpolitik* – though *Realpolitik* may use the dream for its own ends. Thus from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century the House of Habsburg used the idea of the Empire to advance its own power and glory.

The Empire and the system of principalities went together – the open but ill-defined nature of the one, the petty but realistic nature of the other. For the political existence of the Germans both were of importance. The memory of the Empire delayed and

impeded the development of the modern nation-state; in the end it contributed to its establishment and deformed it. Much of the nation's combination of political superiority and inferiority complexes stemmed originally from that memory. Germans felt superior to other people because the Empire had been theirs and because they believed themselves to have inherited the civilizing mission of the Romans; they felt inferior because for many years the antiquated, cumbersome machinery of the Empire had been outmanoeuvred by the more versatile western nation-states, and because German political reality was usually confined to small principalities with no great historical mission. This is what happened and one can only marvel that it did. None of the nations that came into being in the early Middle Ages could claim to be the heir of Rome, the Germans even less than their Latin-speaking neighbours to the west and south, and Europe never did entrust them with Rome's civilizing mission.

The Empire was Germany's western face. It was the form which Germany tried to give to its relations with its western and southern neighbours. In some way or other the Low Countries, Lorraine, Burgundy and Italy were to be parts of the Empire, which was conceived as a static system. The purpose of the German Emperors' Italian campaigns was not to extend the Empire but to restore an existing system, to force perverse reality to conform to the idea. With those expeditions the Emperors wanted to establish in Italy the authority which they lacked in Germany and with which they hoped to subdue Germany – an intention that was never fulfilled. In the East, where the Germans were threatened and threatened others, the role of the Empire was small. Here there were unrest and oppression, new things were created on new ground, not an old dream revived. Here German princes, the dynasties of the Babenbergs, the Ascanians, the Guelfs, the Teutonic Knights, the Habsburgs and the Hohenzollern, acted on their own. One result was that in the East the German nation outgrew the Empire first in fact and then also in form. In the West and the South the Empire included regions which were not, or which gradually ceased to be, German; in the East it excluded regions which gradually became German. The two most powerful German

states in modern times, Austria and Prussia, thus came to have some of their centres of gravity outside the Empire. Independent of the Empire, independent even of the German principalities, members of the German nation lived among Poles, Czechs and Magyars, lived in the towns as artisans and traders – a *Deutschtum im Ausland* (Germans living abroad) centuries before the expression was invented. The involvement of the Germans in the life of eastern Europe gave rise in the era of imperialism, in modern times, to the false belief that the East was the Empire's true sphere of activity. The legend of the supra-national structure preserved and directed by Germans, which was supposed to be a national system as well, was transferred to regions outside the medieval *imperium*. In our day this delusion, this claim, finally led to a terrible defeat of the Germans in the East, the consequences of which cannot be assessed even now.

✓ Another cardinal factor – a cardinal event – in German history is Luther's rebellion.

Let us leave aside the question of the origins of religion and the extent to which it may be affected by other, non-religious factors. Everything in life has a bearing on everything else. It is enough to say that religion was a determining influence everywhere. How could it be otherwise? Man's idea of himself, of his place in the world, of his relations with his fellow men, of the meaning and purpose of existence, his beliefs, hopes and fears inevitably affect the organization of the community. ✓ Karl Marx commented sarcastically that even in the Christian Middle Ages man was not able to live by religion alone, and he was obviously right. But the Christian Church helped to decide how man lived, and how he was governed, what he feared, what gave him comfort and what were his economic, moral and aesthetic codes.

As for Protestantism, the modern variety of Christianity, all the peoples and states of western Europe began to come into conflict with the Roman Church in the sixteenth century. In some places – in Spain, Italy, Hungary and Poland – the Counter-Reformation triumphed, although it was the Catholic states, particularly the Spanish Empire, rather than the Papacy that benefited from its

success. In France after bitter religious wars the Protestants remained a minority, at times very powerful, then tolerated, then persecuted, finally to become a small but indispensable part of the life of the modern state, active in industry, science, philosophy and politics. There is a slight resemblance between them and the Catholic community in England, another numerically small, suspect minority which won equality of civil rights only in the nineteenth century.

In Germany the nation was nearly split in half by the religious quarrels of the sixteenth century. This split did not happen elsewhere and all one can say is that it did happen in Germany, although it was apparently by no means inevitable. Protestantism was originally a German affair. It was born in Germany and there – to use an abused expression since we have no other – it became a popular movement within a few years. In Germany Protestantism found its incarnation in a man unique among the spiritual leaders of the day, not because of the power of his mind – in that respect Calvin was superior to Luther – but because of his popularity, his magnetic strength and depth of character. Why was Martin Luther, the poet and writer, the mystic, the inspiring preacher, the born politician and demagogue, unable to give the nation new spiritual and temporal unity, why did he fail to achieve what a few clever English rulers accomplished without much difficulty? The problems that faced Luther were too hopelessly entangled; he could not unravel them.

The German Emperor of the day would have liked to bring the Empire under the control of his dynasty. But he was also King of Spain and had long ceased to be a German. The unity that he would have brought, had he been allowed a free hand, would not have been spontaneously German but imposed from abroad. Charles V could not put himself at the head of the Protestant movement which, if victorious, would have divided his multi-lingual *imperium* into Protestant national states; he was bound to fight it. The result was a new form of division. The Counter-Reformation was victorious in Austria, Bavaria, on the Rhine and here and there in central Germany; north and east remained Protestant. Once more it was the princes who benefited from the

confused revolution – the Protestant ones who enriched their states with church property and each of whom now became his own Pope, as well as those who had remained Catholic. Henceforth a man's religion was determined for him by his territorial ruler.

Class wars embittered the issue. Whenever in the history of Europe the simple people have come in contact with the original texts of the New Testament there has been social unrest because its message is one of human equality and justice and is hostile to the rich. Luther's interpretation was different. The malevolent attitude which he adopted during the Peasants' War, and the brutality with which he called for the destruction of the rebels, did much to rob his cause of its attraction and the public of their hope. The man who had caused so much confusion was basically a conservative, and it emerged that he stood for order at any price.

An achievement like Luther's has many aspects and contains political and non-political elements, liberating and repressive ones. One selects from it what one can use and one employs it for purposes for which it was never intended. Nevertheless, the idea that every Christian could look after his own soul and needed no ordained priest to intercede for him, and that the thousand-year achievement of the Roman authority should no longer count when confronted with the living interpretation of the Scriptures, was revolutionary and released both good and evil influences. But the freedom which Luther preached was only spiritual and had nothing to do with political freedom. The good Christian was completely passive. He was free – spiritually – even when in chains, and he owed complete obedience to authority, any authority. But authority must be armed with a sharp sword because the people could not be relied upon to be disciplined voluntarily. Luther, who was optimistic enough to break the authority of the Pope and to believe that the individual, or at any rate he personally, could interpret the Bible correctly, was at the same time profoundly pessimistic about human nature. As a result, Luther's activities strengthened the authority of the princes and worked against the responsibility of the Estates as it had

developed in the late Middle Ages. Luther was despotic and superstitious and soon – as soon as he was himself no longer threatened by persecution – became a persecutor.

How then do the first two cardinal factors in German history affect the third, Luther's Reformation? It was the Empire, cumbersome, complex and entangled in non-German affairs as it was in 1520, that decided the fate of Protestantism and alone explains the religious partition. It was the German princes who gained by it. Since the eastward-looking, newly German or colonial parts of Germany – Brandenburg, Pomerania and Prussia – became Protestant while the old Empire to the south and the west remained predominantly Catholic, the Reformation once again strengthened the dividing line between the two regions of Germany. Many are the forms – terrible war and peaceful competition, the establishment of states, cultural agreements and political alliances – in which this confessional dualism has manifested itself; it still exists today.

The period of Charles V and Luther was the last in which the Empire was the centre of the spiritual and temporal storms that shook Europe. Thereafter its importance declined. Protestantism itself hardened and fruitless disputations took the place of the tremendous, vital experience that had found expression in the young Luther. There is something questionable about petrified, officially sponsored, organized protest. A movement like Protestantism must continually be reborn, must search ever deeper and grow beyond itself, as it did periodically in the Anglo-Saxon countries into the twentieth century. In Germany, too, individual Protestants were creative in intellectual and public life, but the Lutheran state churches soon ceased to be a source of creative unrest. The greatest German Protestants were those who, though of Lutheran descent, outgrew all ecclesiastical and even Christian restriction – Leibniz, Lessing, Hegel, Nietzsche.

The hardening of the Lutheran revolution is not the only, or even the main, reason why around 1600 the Empire no longer occupied the same place in the world as a hundred years earlier.

Germany, which so far had shared all Europe's great experiences – the Roman occupation and Christianity, feudalism and the

crusades, the monastic movement and the universities, cities and middle classes, Renaissance and Reformation – now failed to share the greatest of them all: the incipient Europeanization of the world. German ships ploughed neither the Atlantic nor the Indian Ocean. Germany's trade declined, its cities grew poor and its middle class became fossilized. Of the matchless education provided by colonization, the widening of horizons, the increase in material wealth and the quickening rhythm of life, Germany had only a small share. The big decisions were made elsewhere. While the Dutch were founding their republic, the first free active federation of states in modern times, and while England was fighting its heroic duel with Spain, German Protestant and Catholic princelings waylaid each other, and now and again one of them annexed some impoverished imperial city. At the time when the most fateful development of modern history, the Anglo-Saxon colonization of North America, began in earnest, Germany started its Thirty Years War.

Great wars and historical crises in general can be looked at from different angles. It has been said of the so-called First World War that it was primarily a duel between Germany and Britain, or between Germany and Russia, a new chapter in the age-old struggle between Teutons and Slavs, a war between democracy and autocracy, the last in a long series of conflicts between Germany and France, and so on. Perhaps it was all these things and more. Perhaps it was really none of them and was completely devoid of sense, nothing but – nonsense. Nations have always managed to find some rational necessity, some ideological reason for murdering each other.

Of all the great wars of modern times the Thirty Years War was the most confused, the maddest, a mass of cross-currents, clashing ambition, fanaticism and fear. It was a religious war between Catholics and Protestants in which the Catholic states led by Bavaria took the side of the Catholic Habsburgs. It was also an attempt by the Spanish-Austrian dynasty to subdue the Empire, resisted by an alliance between the Catholic princes led by Bavaria, and the Protestant ones. The intervention of France was aimed less against Germany than against the great international

power of the Habsburgs which had its centre of gravity in Madrid. The intervention of Sweden, on the other hand, was not aimed against Spain but against the danger of a revival of the German Empire in northern Germany and on the Baltic. Wallenstein, the man who strove for that revival, who dreamed of a German navy, who wanted to dethrone the princelings and to transform Germany into a state like France and Spain, was not a German but a brilliant Bohemian financier and adventurer who corresponded with his intimates in Czech. The German Emperor did not understand his plans and dropped him. The war began as a chapter in the Austrian Counter-Reformation and a conflict between the Habsburgs and the estates of the kingdom of Bohemia, whose relationship to the Empire was uncertain. It ended as a war between France, Sweden and Holland on the one side and Austria and Spain on the other, with Germany in the middle and on both sides, while nobody cared any longer about the liberties of Bohemia. Great wars usually finish up as something completely different from what they were at the beginning and people forget how and why the conflict began. But such wars also speed up, and in retrospect confirm, new developments. They stimulate the rise of nations, or classes, or ways of life that were emerging anyway; they hasten the disappearance of those that were already on the decline. The Thirty Years War confirmed a long-standing trend in the development of the German Empire.

The victors – if there are any victors at all in such prolonged struggles – were the new western powers, France, Holland and also Sweden. The German princes were victorious to the extent that they gained by the Peace of Westphalia the independence which they wanted. Even the House of Habsburg might be described as a victor. Although it had failed to conquer the Empire, it emerged from the chaos of war as a European power, detached from the Empire and based on the Austrian provinces, Hungary and Bohemia. It was detached from the Empire partly because in reality the Empire no longer existed. The loser therefore was the Empire, and hence the people, because hitherto the Empire had been a source of law and legal protection. Henceforth the princes ruled by absolute right. The main loser, however, was

German civilization. Recently historians have tried to minimize the horrors of the Thirty Years War by disproving the statistical basis of the accepted view of the terrible decline in the population, the sacking and destruction of cities and the sufferings of the rural population; in short they have presented the whole war more or less as an invention of Prussian anti-Habsburg propaganda. There may be something in this. Even Schiller in his description of the fall of Magdeburg based himself on Protestant reports and even on him these made the impression which had been intended. But the reality of this catastrophe, of Europe's material and moral crisis, is obvious. It reveals itself in the magnificent dirges, poems and songs of the day, in Grimmelshausen's *Abenteuerlicher Simplicissimus* (Adventures of a Simpleton), and even in the stilted exchanges of the diplomats. A country still rich and flourishing was gradually destroyed by annual armed clashes, shrewd scheming in the face of almost continuous negotiations and by much hypocritical talk about the desirability of peace. As Wallenstein wrote: 'In the end, when all countries are reduced to ashes we shall have to make peace.' Reconstruction took decades, in a sense centuries. People had not in those days achieved our scientific perfection either in destruction or in reconstruction.

Compelled in the sixteenth century to give up its place in the front line of history, Germany was henceforth relegated completely to the background. This situation was emphasized by the rapid rise of its neighbour, France. The French *Grand Siècle* began as the Thirty Years War ended. German, which had earlier had a hard struggle with Spanish and Italian, was now superseded by French as the language of politics, art and science. The German writers of the next hundred years, with the exception of Leibniz, were insignificant by comparison with their French contemporaries.

In human terms a century and a half is a long time and, although these years were unusually peaceful, the western world in 1789 was strikingly different from that of 1648. Scarcely a single great change of this period took place in Germany or was initiated there. France rose to the heights of a Catholic absolutism reminiscent

of the Roman Empire and fought for hegemony in Europe. Intellectual freedom made headway in Holland; republicans, materialists and atheists began to make themselves talked about. The English kings who had wanted to emulate the French Bourbons failed; out of the medieval estates there developed a parliament and government by parties, a cabinet and a prime minister. Locke advanced his concept of the limited, liberal state, of the social contract and of popular representation in reply to Hobbes's theory of the divine right of kings. Russia appeared in western politics and became a power on the Baltic and a major force in Europe. Britain and France fought for India and North America; hardly had the French been defeated than the British Americans began to make difficulties for their mother country. The Bank of England was set up, paper money was introduced, and speculation flourished on the Stock Exchange; financiers, wealthy members of the middle classes, journalists and demagogues exerted their influence. The steam engine and the spinning jenny were invented and the production of coal increased. Defoe, Swift and Fielding wrote satires, Voltaire wrote stories and pamphlets. But in 1750 the abbots of Salmansweiler, an abbey under direct imperial control, ruled as they had ruled in 1650 and continued to send their contingent of twelve men to the Imperial army. Nothing changed in the country of Laubach except when some reigning count added a rococo wing to his medieval castle, or another, moved by the spirit of the Enlightenment, founded an orphanage. The Empire remained unreformed and unadapted and gradually acquired the reputation of being something very old and very comic. Thus in the end the German nation could imagine that it was younger than other nations. It was youthful in so far as its antiquated, fossilized institutions were no longer suited to the nation and the age.

The break between Austria and Germany established by the Peace of Westphalia was confirmed by Austria's expansion south-eastwards and by Prince Eugène's victories over the Turks. The old Bavarian *Ostmark* became the great Danubian monarchy, an independent empire governed instinctively by ancient Roman and Byzantine traditions, the product of conquest and inheritance

but still historically 'more logical' and geographically more fitting than its expansionist politicians realized. There were Germans in this Empire, but they were fewer than the Slavs, Magyars and Italians.

Less logical historically, more artificial and more violent was the state that developed in the north-east, the rise of which represents the most important German political event of the eighteenth century. Even at that time this development seemed revolutionary, though not as portentous as it was to prove in the nineteenth century.

*and to
Taylor*
We have spoken of the cardinal factors in German history, of Germany's position between East and West, of the Empire and of the Reformation. Prussia is no such cardinal factor; it only existed for a hundred and fifty years, from the early days of Frederick the Great to the early days of William II. There was no Prussia as an historically active factor before Frederick's Silesian wars, and long before the Prussian state disappeared formally in our own days it had been absorbed by Germany. Whatever the future may bring, Prussia will never reappear, and given the quick pace of modern life, its name will soon be forgotten. Prussia's history was brief. But its function, its unpredictable role, the unwanted opportunity assigned to it by the caprice of history, was to give the German nation its modern political shape – a task which it accomplished in its own characteristic and not very happy way. Then it disappeared.

An old French encyclopaedia describes Prussia as 'a kingdom that has grown by war and robbery'. That can be said of all kingdoms – and of most republics. Frederick the Great did the same as Louis of France or Peter of Russia or President Polk of the United States of America. But in the case of these others the meaning of their conquests becomes clear in retrospect: they gave the nation its state. The kings of France, though petty rulers at first, were always the Kings of France; the history of their aggrandizement is the history of the growth of France. The same is not true of the Prussian state, which only served its own interests. It did not exist for the German nation – the marriage between the two came very much later – nor did it exist for the

good of its subjects, although it made great demands upon them. Sociologists tell us that there really is no such monstrosity as a state and that people who talk about the interests of the state mean certain social classes, bureaucrats, landowners or soldiers, the sum of whose material interests make up the 'state'. Such sensible theories do not give us the whole truth. The hapless barrack kings who created the Prussian state could have enjoyed life like any German prince as Margraves of Brandenburg; to do so they did not need Prussia. They did not work for themselves, they worked for the state and almost killed themselves with work. We must also qualify the old legend that Prussia was a Junker state. Junkers – privileged landowners – existed elsewhere, east and west of the Elbe, and elsewhere they were better off than in Prussia. They were, and remained, the masters in Mecklenburg. They were, under the patronage of the Tsar, the masters in the Russian Baltic provinces. They were the masters in Poland. They were the masters in Hanover because the Elector, who was also King of England, was away and left the aristocracy of his native country to its own devices. They were not the masters in Prussia. Only after it had destroyed the rights of both the Junkers and the cities did the state reach an unwritten compromise with the aristocracy in the reign of Frederick the Great. The nobles were allowed to continue to rule the countryside, to sit in judgement over their peasants and monopolize the senior careers in the army and the administration. As long as they allowed the King to govern. These concessions gradually reconciled the Junkers to the absolute state which later provided them with profit and protection. Nevertheless one cannot say that they made Prussia; the Prussian state made itself. Or to put it in a less mystical way: it was the creation of a few kings possessed by the fury of *raison d'état* and of the servants whom they commanded.

If Bavaria, and even Württemberg or Hanover, gave distinct groups of Germans something resembling political organization, such was not the case in Prussia; there was no Prussian ethnic group. At times the Prussian state had almost as many Polish as German subjects, at others there were as many from western and

central Germany as from east of the Elbe. The number of subjects was more important than their nationality or character. Austria was later called the Danube monarchy because the great river was its lifeline. Prussia had a small share in several parallel river systems: there was a reasonably compact region east of the Elbe and some stretches of land between the Elbe and the Rhine. Prussia could just as well have spread elsewhere and there were times when it sought to lay its hands on places deep in southern Germany, on Ansbach, Sigmaringen and even the Lake of Neuchâtel. 'Other states,' wrote Mirabeau, 'have an army, in Prussia the army has a state.' He should have said: other nations have a state, in Prussia the state has a number of territories, fragments of one or more nations.

Even what is said about the army is not true. Prussia was not ruled by a brutal soldiery and by arrogant generals. Discipline among the soldiers was extreme and frightening and the officers were modestly paid and non-political. Although the army represented by far the greatest item of expenditure in the budget and although the whole administration was geared to the army, the purpose of the army was to serve the state, to maintain, to preserve and to extend it. Military considerations determined economic policy: the everlasting taxes, government monopolies and tariffs, the protection and encouragement of industry which the king used to fill his exchequer. All this was later called militarism, although *étatisme* would be a more accurate word. Romantic glorification of war did not appeal to the kings of Prussia. They were as parsimonious with war as with everything else. An artificial state surrounded by old, genuine and menacing states needed a strong army as a machine needs a motor.

As far as the eighteenth century is concerned we shall do well to forget the old idea of 'reactionary' Prussia. In those days Prussia was looked upon not as reactionary but as progressive and enlightened. It was thought to be well ruled because it was ruled in the interest of the state by a strict professional king and a reliable, professional bureaucracy. Its administration was rational, logical and honest, its justice prompt and impartial, approaching what was later called the reign of law. This picture of a progressive

sensible Prussia, almost republican despite its absolute monarchy, survived in France even after Frederick's death and only gradually gave place to another in the nineteenth century.

The focal point of all pro-Prussian sympathies was the monarch who had managed to transform some fragments of north German territory into a great power on which the peace of Europe depended. Frederick astonished the world and kept it in suspense, and this people liked. The Empire was *gemütlich* and, from a political point of view, almost comic. Prussia was not *gemütlich* but its king was taken seriously. His alliance with Britain brought provincial, neglected Germany back into world politics. His seven-year struggle with the three greatest military powers earned him the admiration of even those Germans – they were in the majority – for whom the centre of the nation was still Vienna and not Berlin, which to them was a long way away, anti-imperial, new and foreign. Moreover Frederick was not only a soldier and man of action but also a 'philosopher' and man of letters – an unheard-of combination. He was tolerant and permitted freedom of thought. He permitted it in the religious and metaphysical sphere, which did not interest him, but not in politics. This fact tended to be disregarded because even the French were interested not in political but in philosophical freedom – and in philosophical, strong, efficient, absolute government, which Frederick appeared to provide. Learned and would-be learned men from all over the world made the pilgrimage to visit him.

What a great man, curious, lovable and repulsive! The founder of Prussian Germany spoke and wrote poetry in French and mocked the German way of life. King by the grace of God but without a religion, philanthropist and misanthropist, free-thinker and despot, citizen-King and protector of the Junkers, still the idol of the nationalists many years later, by nature a cold, unhappy cynic who had no contact with the people, cultured, musical, yet superstitious, stubborn and morose – that is how Frederick II appears in retrospect and how he stands at the centre of Prussian-German history. His legend was bad for the Germans because it first gave them the idea that great men must perform great deeds, that the magician can do what he likes, and that there

is no need to pay attention to his methods provided he continues to bring success.

The division of Poland to which Frederick agreed in the seventies was more than a German affair. It was an audacious, shameless piece of east European politics, a division of spoils between three independent powers, Prussia, Austria and Russia. But it was approved by left-wing intellectuals like Voltaire and Mirabeau because the Polish peasants had suffered wretchedly under their own masters and would be much better ruled by the enlightened King of Prussia.

Mirabeau the younger liked the whole German federal system and sang its praises in the last volume of his work on the Prussian monarchy. In his view a number of interrelated small states was preferable to a great single, centralized state. A nation organized on those lines had no capital or artistic centre, but this loss, if it were a loss, was counterbalanced by the wealth and variety of numerous small competing centres. There was freedom in Germany because what could not be said or done in one state could always be said or done in another; emigration to a new home never involved more than a day's journey. The German princes kept an eye on each other, many of them were excellent rulers and only a small minority actually did harm. They vied with each other to promote learning and to train a good civil service.

It is impossible to make serious comparisons between one age and another. We are the children of our time, and to say, as we sometimes do, that we would rather have lived in another century is empty talk. Every age has its fears and privations as well as its achievements and pleasures, the enjoyment of which is rarely distributed justly. Those of our contemporaries who would like to have lived in the eighteenth century see themselves as sons of Frankfurt patricians or as Austrian counts and patrons of Mozart, not as persecuted free-thinkers languishing in the gaols of the duke of Württemberg or as serfs in Mecklenburg. But it is safe to say that whereas at the time of the Thirty Years War it was a misfortune to have been born a German, generally speaking this was no longer true a hundred years later. Although the political system was still what had emerged from the treaties of Westphalia, there

was a new spirit transcending the old forms where it could not fill them with new life; and much of the literature and architecture of the times conveys a feeling of contentment.

Mirabeau was probably right in thinking that some of the German rulers were excellent. Baden, Brunswick, Weimar and Dessau had rulers who were abreast of the Enlightenment, which they tried to apply for the welfare of their subjects; they did not merely pay lip-service to it like Catherine the Great. Alongside these there still existed some ugly caricatures of French absolutism. In retrospect it is easy to reject a form of government whose success depended so much on the accident of personality. But every period has its own ideas and the ideal of the later eighteenth century was good government, not democratic government as an end in itself, nor even government safeguarded by democracy. Gradually the feeling grew that the days of the prince-bishoprics, that strangest form of government of the old Empire, were numbered – but not because they lacked democratic foundation. If anything, the fact that the prince-bishop was elected and that the cathedral chapter had certain rights made the ecclesiastical territories a little more democratic than the hereditary states. They were considered out-of-date because they belonged to the Church and the trend of the age was rationalistic and secular; hence the fate which befell them was aptly described as secularization. The functions of the ruler-priests were to be taken over not by the 'people' but by bigger and more rationally organized monarchies.

The most radical political theorist of the seventeen eighties was certainly no democrat, nor even a representative of the aspiring bourgeoisie, but the elected 'Roman' emperor, the ruler of the Austrian hereditary lands, Joseph II of the House of Habsburg-Lorraine. This talented fanatic did more in the way of levelling, centralizing and rationalizing than would have occurred to the most progressive professor. He tried to transform the Church into an obedient state institution, looted the monasteries, suppressed 'useless' orders, and his Prime Minister, if not he himself, made a laughing stock of the Pope during his desperate visit to Vienna. He rejected all coronation ceremonies as antiquated nonsense and

presented himself to his peoples as the industrious head of a bureaucracy which was clearing away the remains of the old corporate institutions. He rode roughshod over national differences and intervened benevolently in the lives and deaths of his subjects. The Emperor accepted the idea of freedom or spiritual tolerance to the extent that he abandoned for a time all control of books – an act which he came to regret. On the whole, however, freedom was confined to the kind of discussion which did not affect his own monopoly of power. He did not for one moment doubt that he and his heirs would remain masters of the great, reorganized bureaucracy which worked for the good of all his subjects.

Aufklärung, the German word for enlightenment made famous by Immanuel Kant, was later also used in other languages to describe a basic spiritual trend of the eighteenth century. The Germans now took a leading part in a supra-national, western intellectual movement. They did not begin it; enlightenment was already at work in the English revolution and in the French opposition to Louis XIV. Nothing in history really starts at one particular moment; the spirit of the enlightenment can be traced back to the Renaissance and to rebellious scholars in the Middle Ages. But by the second half of the eighteenth century enlightenment had become the triumphant, sometimes the reigning, philosophy.

Enlightenment, whatever else it meant, signified active freedom of ideas, criticism of tradition and authority – benevolent criticism for creative and not for destructive purposes. Existing values were brought before the tribunal of reason which either supported the requirements of expediency, the interests and passions of the present against the dead weight of the past, or was confident of its ability to recognize eternal commands of God or of Nature. These two attitudes existed in Germany; the second, and better of the two, was the more prevalent. Yet they lacked the backing of a self-assured middle class. No one doubted that John Locke spoke for the old oligarchy and the new English upper middle classes. The demands of the Third Estate in France were the product of a strong, prosperous bourgeoisie. By comparison the German

middle class was weak; the proudest cities, Nuremberg and Augsburg, seemed like shadows of their glorious past. The German enlightenment did not have its roots in any particular class. The cause of this is to be found more in the character of the middle class with its deep respect for authority and in the egotistical sense of self-preservation of the patriciate than in economic backwardness. Anyway the enlightenment did not become a movement of political protest as in France. Its representatives were senior civil servants and ministers close to the rulers, and even, as we have seen, some of the rulers themselves; or they were writers, poets, publishers of journals in Berlin or Göttingen, and professors. The first group was interested mainly in the problems of improved administration and not in the constitution or the political rights of the citizen. The second indulged in great scientific, moral and metaphysical speculations but took care not to make political demands. The most outstanding of them, Immanuel Kant, remained an obedient subject of the King of Prussia.

Never in recent times has Germany been in such complete harmony with the best qualities of its western neighbours or reached such heights of European genius as in the person of this unique man. In vain has he been presented as a purely German phenomenon by stressing for example the 'Prussian' character of the somewhat austere theory of duty which he advanced in his old age. In vain has he been presented as an un-German cosmopolitan, the last in a line of an English philosophical tradition, whose family was of Scottish origin. He was certainly cosmopolitan because his concern was with man. Contemptuously he pushed aside the novel 'appeal of fools in Germany to show national pride'. He who himself became such a powerful influence was open to foreign ideas, French – those of Rousseau – as well as English. Philosophy and science know no political frontiers. But he was also German without being aggressive about it. His simple, beautiful language was German, as were his old-fashioned politeness and reticence and also his passionate interest in what was happening abroad, in the reforms of Joseph II, in the American and then in the French Revolution.

Kant was no optimist. He took mankind and its history very

seriously and had a lofty conception of man's tasks and of the demands made on him. But he did not expect too much, least of all from politicians. He knew much more than John Locke about the future dangers springing from the wickedness of the human heart and from technical progress uncontrolled by a sense of truth and justice. He knew this not because he was born later but because he had a more incisive mind and a more acute sense of observation. Kant thought that learning had made man cunning but that he lacked morals to make him civilized; man was always ready to fight, but not for justice. Even if he went to war for a just cause it soon developed into an unjust one. It was better to go to war honestly for purposes of conquest than for punitive reasons. Crusades for justice logically pursued must end with internecine destruction 'in the universal graveyard of mankind'. Such an end was probable anyway if one remembered how much progress military science had made and would certainly continue to make: a hell of evils, a barbaric destruction of civilization by civilization itself. Kant refused, however, to believe in such an end. It was impossible to believe something that was an insult to all religion and to the whole purpose of human existence. Man was free to escape self-destruction and to raise himself to a truly moral, truly republican state. It was possible that he might be helped by Nature herself, by the hard facts that were not concerned with morals. Perhaps Nature was using human injustice and aggressiveness to accomplish what could not be accomplished in the modern military state: the free development of all man's dormant talents, the establishment of eternal peace. Had Nature not used these forces to create the state towards which the individual savage adopted the same attitude as the state would one day adopt towards world federation? People who started political intrigues were unaware of this; perhaps the purpose of all wars was the final end of such intrigues and eternal peace. The turning point would come at the moment of greatest distress and extreme danger. This might take some time yet, but man had no need to save time. The individual could never reach the goal of mankind; perhaps the species might, or at any rate it could get closer to it. Meanwhile one ought at least to acquaint nations with the idea

and write history 'with world citizenship in mind' because without awareness of a common past and a common task there could be no community of interest in the present. Kant was a hard-headed naturalist; no wickedness or stupidity, nothing that happened in life surprised him. He could be sarcastic like Voltaire and realistic like Hobbes, but he was less dangerously one-sided than either. In spite of the most bitter knowledge he could be as enthusiastic as Rousseau or Schiller. A veil of shyness concealed faith, charity and hope. Many pronouncements made since his day have become stale but Kant's speculations about history, politics and the position of man as a political animal are as alive today as they were almost two hundred years ago.

Our reflections have reached the moment in time when we must take up the story in greater detail. 'Modern' can mean many things. To us the Germany of the Emperor William II appears old-fashioned and far away. But some readers will still have known it and William died only in 1941. Anglo-Saxon historians date the beginning of modern history from the discovery of America and the early sixteenth century. German historians usually start with the French Revolution. There are even some writers who think that modern history ended a short while ago and that we are now living in the 'post-modern' age. Such classifications are misleading; they serve practical purposes and disappear with them.

However, the period of the French Revolution and perhaps even more the years immediately preceding it can be called 'modern' in two senses. From our point of view because we have ever since been a prey to conflicts, hopes and fears which emerged at that time. Some of the things that existed then are still 'topical' today, such as the philosophy of Immanuel Kant. But the men of the late eighteenth century were modern also in the sense that they regarded themselves as modern, as different from everything in the past. They were hopeful, even exuberant, and sure of their cause. They despised the dark past, the Middle Ages, which even Kant called an 'incomprehensible aberration of the human mind'; nor did they think highly of their own political institutions. For

the first time in history everything would now be sensibly arranged and this arrangement would last.

In Germany the change was one of attitudes far more than of institutions. The economic life of the country at the end of the century does not seem very different from what it had been at the beginning. Cities were small and had not expanded for centuries, if they had not actually shrunk in size. The vast majority of the population continued to earn its living by agriculture and town and country continued to be closely linked. Traffic continued to be slow and small in volume, roads were few and forests large. Part of the aristocracy and some merchants in Hamburg or Frankfurt were rich; bourgeois and officials lived in respectable modesty; the peasants produced almost everything needed for life. Industry as the word came to be understood was in its infancy. But the spiritual life of a nation is more spontaneous, freer, and its sources are more mysterious than certain writers are willing to admit. It was not the growing prosperity of the middle class which inspired Friedrich Schiller to write *Die Räuber* or *Kabale und Liebe*, but the restless spirit of the age and Schiller's own genius. What would happen now, what would the future bring?

Looked at from the seventeen-eighties the future did not present any insoluble problems, no terrible wars, no venomous religious struggles, no last stand by the defeated ruling classes, least of all a rebellion of Germany against Europe. Never was Germany more European and popular, never was there more hopeful good will and less fear. Of course another diplomatic crisis was imminent, but that was nothing unusual. The Turkish Empire in the Balkans seemed ripe for dissolution. Two eastern powers, Austria and Russia, were about to become its heirs, partitioning it after the Polish example and fighting over it. The same fate could be prophesied for the sad remains of the Polish elective monarchy. And what would become of the German Empire, that galaxy of imperial knights and imperial cities, of abbeys, bishoprics, margraves and landgraves, that baroque system which was clearly no longer suited to the age but which would not die? Here too the most likely solution seemed the application of the

new system of partition, with the two great German, or semi-German, powers acting as executors. Joseph II had wanted to acquire Bavaria by barter but his attempts had been foiled by the King of Prussia acting as protector of the German princes. Perhaps the King's successor could be paid off with a comparable gain in the north? How would France which had been forced to swallow the partition of Poland, react to a violent solution of Germany's domestic problems? How would England react to a Russian drive for Constantinople? These were the questions which diplomats asked themselves pessimistically. Such chaos had not threatened since the Thirty Years War. But it would be confined to the diplomatic and military spheres which, according to eighteenth century conceptions, affected only a few.

The crisis did in fact come in the fourth year after the death of the great Frederick. But, as so often happens, it came from a direction and in a way which no one had expected.

Part Two

Stormy Beginning (1789-1815)

At the beginning of modern German history lie twenty-five restless years.

*Das Jahrhundert ist im Sturm geschieden
Und das neue öffnet sich mit Mord . . .**

was Schiller's comment on the turn of the century. Still, even then most Germans probably tilled the land as they always had and only occasionally looked up from the plough when a neighbour told them that they were no longer citizens of Fürstenberg but of Baden, or that the Emperor Napoleon had set out for Russia with an army the like of which had never been seen before. Young noblemen made their grand tour, their educational journey to France and Italy, just as in peace time. In those days only a few people were completely caught up in political events. The great majority was only partially affected, by being compelled to do military service, by economic changes, blockade and inflation, or by the development of new industries. But there was much unrest and profound changes took place. During the first quarter of the century the nation certainly did not lack creativeness; in philosophy, literature and poetry it possessed a greater wealth of genius and talent than ever before or since. Nevertheless Germany was essentially passive during the great political crisis of the Revolution and the Napoleonic period. It watched neighbouring nations, Frenchmen and Britons, fight a prolonged duel with unprecedented energy and bitterness, and was forced to pay a good part of the costs which should not have been its concern. Things happened to Germany, but they were done to it by others. The

*The century went out in a storm and the new one opens with murder . . .

country adapted itself, not without a sense of constructiveness in southern Germany, not without creative genius in Prussia after 1807, not without diplomatic elegance in Austria. But it was only a process of adaptation, voluntary or compulsory, to great happenings elsewhere. The French Revolution was hot, the German cold. Traditions were abandoned, political frontiers, laws and living beings shaken up, but only in the way in which eighteenth century oligarchy might have done; there were no public meetings, no storming of Bastilles and no guillotines. The storm blew elsewhere, Germany only felt its effects. As a result the Germans had in years to come no wish to look back and be proud of the great political and social transformation that occurred at the beginning of the nineteenth century; they saw it as a time of shame, however lasting or positive its achievements. The Germans became active – against France – only during the last act of the long revolutionary drama, in 1813. Even then they did not play a really glorious role comparable with that of the British or the Russians. Though the 'War of Liberation' was a notable effort on the part of the Germans it was not the popular uprising that contemporary, and even more later, imagination wanted to make of it.

It was not in 1813–14 that Germany took revenge for its passivity during the Napoleonic drama. The real reaction to that experience came later, in the second half of the century. What psychologists teach about the individual also applies to the nation: it can harbour old, unpleasant memories, transform them in strange ways and derive aggressive energies from them.

1. Germany and the French Revolution

The incidents which had begun to alarm the French kingdom in the spring of 1789 were followed with the greatest interest east of the Rhine. After the autumn they were called 'the revolution in France', a name which this curious sequence of events has

kept, and which we still use to describe various basically distinct things.

Originally no one had thought of 'revolution'. The aim of the French rulers was to make use of the ancient institution of the Estates General for moderate reforms. Not one of the elected representatives came to Versailles thinking of violent change. But soon the world heard of the transformation of the assemblies of the three Estates into a single national assembly; of the revolt of the city of Paris; of the compulsory move of the King from his fairy castle in the country to the heart of the capital frighteningly teeming with democrats; of the great, enthusiastic or forced renunciations of the two privileged classes, the clergy and the aristocracy. Then things quietened down. For a time it seemed as though it might be possible to set up in the Old World a grandly conceived constitutional state parallel to the one recently established in the New World. A national state, indivisible but sensibly divided into small administrative units, in which there was equality for all before the law, in which the King as hereditary president ruled through ministers responsible to parliament, in which the church was a state institution, in which everybody contributed according to his means to cover public expenditure and in which all careers were open to everyone. A state with a peaceful foreign policy – with such a lofty conception of the dignity of one's own people how could one wish to enslave others? – in which speech, scholarship and religion were free and everything was transfused by the spirit of civic virtue and charity.

But men fail most easily when they are too enthusiastic. The idea is spoilt by its exponents, who are creatures of flesh and blood and egoism. Excess produces reactions against which it in turn reacts, assuming even more extreme forms. The clash of many mixed and changeable aims produces the most unpredictable situations, as it did in France at the beginning of the seven-teen nineties. The winds blowing through the country became a hurricane destroying human beings and things. Half-hearted co-operation and secret resistance by the *ancien régime* hastened the revolution. The greatest politicians quickly exhausted themselves. Inexperienced theorists tried their hand at that most

difficult of all games – playing with power in times of revolution. The most vocal doctrinaires in Paris became more uncompromising and more defiant. After two and a half years the King was still on his throne, a figure of misery, a prisoner, pushed about, looking for help from beyond his frontiers but fearing it; the party in power openly wanted war with traditional Europe.

The Revolution had long ceased to be an internal French affair and had become an adventure in which the rest of Europe had to take part; certainly the nation that lived next to the French, and in certain regions – in Alsace and Lorraine – with the French. By 1792 the revolutionary doctrine had developed into a declaration of war on the whole of old Europe, its monarchs, its privileged classes, its churches, and even those of its states that were baroque creations established by historical accident and held together by dynasties instead of being republican nation-states. Europe's internal unity showed itself at that time, as it has often done since then. The drive of the democratic revolution could not stop at paper frontiers; countless self-appointed propagandists made sure that it would not.

There was no lack of mutual provocation: French emigrants were allowed to pursue their activities on German soil; German property was confiscated in France. The revolution became a war desired finally by both sides, the rulers of France and traditional Europe. But once a great war has come it follows its own law, becoming an end in itself instead of a means, a dominating force which changes all those involved.

The surprising thing now happened: France was victorious. An army of former royal troops and revolutionary volunteers pushed back the Prussians and Austrians. Then the French went over to the attack and a few months later they controlled the Rhineland and Belgium. There followed declarations of war on Britain, Spain and Holland, together with an appeal by the French National Convention to the peoples of the world to rise against their rulers and the promise of help if they did so. Sensationally unexpected victories encouraged the revolutionary rulers to further annexations. Occasional defeats precipitated developments in France. War was confused with civil war; French

peasants allied themselves with the King of England, and while French towns were reduced to rubble on the orders of the rulers in Paris, this suffering land made tremendous efforts abroad. Under the dictatorship of a Committee of Public Safety France kept the European alliance in check. The minor German potentates, ecclesiastical princes and secular rulers, thronged – dispossessed – into the interior of the Empire. Gradually the German nation realized that something had happened that could not be undone, at least not the destruction, and that for better or worse Germany was involved.

The scholars, poets and writers who had gradually emerged in Germany saw their intellectual ability to assimilate experiences put to the test. They owed it to themselves and to their public to make judgements, but the situation they had to judge remained fluid, producing ever greater surprises and disappointments.

Among the older generation it was Immanuel Kant who clung most loyally to his belief in the republic as the only true form of government. In an article entitled *Über den Gemeinspruch: 'Das mag in der Theorie richtig sein, taugt aber nichts für die Praxis'** he showed that the right theory rightly used was undoubtedly practical too. If republicanism, the form of government in which people decided their own fate, was good in theory it must also be good in practice. Disappointing experiences proved nothing except that one had made a false start. 'There can be nothing more damaging and less worthy of a philosopher,' he had written earlier, 'than vulgar reference to experience, since there would be no sad experiences if one behaved in accordance with the correct theory at the right time, and if crude notions, for the very reason that they were taken from experience, had not thwarted every thing.' What interested him in the revolution, he now emphasized, were not the actions of the leaders but the idealism of the masses, which had proved, in spite of everything, that there was a desire for good in man. How else to explain the enthusiasm with which thousands of young Frenchmen had sacrificed themselves for freedom and equality? Against that individual misdeeds mattered

* Concerning the popular saying: 'It may be right in theory but is useless in practice'.

little. Bad people were found under other forms of government but not the patriotism which the French had shown during the revolutionary war. Those were Kant's views. Others, more cautious, were never more than interested spectators like Wieland and Goethe, or turned away with contempt after the first waves of democratic terror had hit Paris.

The young, the unsettled, were overwhelmed by what they read in the papers. Some pursued the revolution to Paris, like Friedrich Georg Foerster, who died there deeply disappointed. To others the revolution came as it did in Coblenz to Joseph Görres, who rejoiced and mocked at the collapse of the old system of government. In his periodical *Rotes Blatt*, he announced the sale of 'three electors' caps of tanned buffalo-hide together with lead-filled crosiers, furnished with daggers and encircled by artificial snakes. The eye of God mounted on top is blind. – Two bishops' mitres, richly trimmed with tinsel, somewhat stained by cold sweat, but otherwise in good condition; hence very useful as red caps on trees of liberty. – A ducal hare skin hat, embellished with cocks' feathers, trimmed with a precious stone distilled by a clever alchemist from the tears of ten thousand widows and orphans . . . A barn-full of patents of nobility, written on asses' skin, but badly moth-eaten in parts and giving out a strange smell of decay . . .' Even distant onlookers like Hegel, then a theological student in Tübingen, or the newly appointed civil servant Friedrich Gentz in Berlin, were affected for life by this experience. Whether they ceased to support the revolution and became its enemies, nationalists instead of cosmopolitans, whether they escaped into the ivory tower of a political philosophy or took up ingeniously thought-out, conciliatory positions avoiding the controversial issues of the day – they never quite succeeded in freeing themselves from their early experiences.

What is true of those who were young in the seventeen nineties is probably true also of the nation as a whole. In some sense Germany itself was young, impressionable and receptive in those days. The events of the French Revolution left an indelible mark on German affairs and German thought.

2. Reorganization from Above

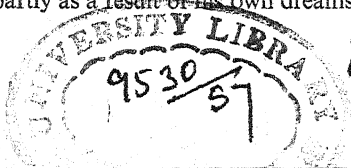
The war of the German powers against France, begun in 1792, continued with short intervals until 1807. There then followed five years of peace – the real ‘Period of the Empire’ – a peace which, on closer inspection, was and could be no peace. The war was a duel between Britain and France over traditional problems, the European balance of power, the Dutch coast and control of the Mediterranean and the Near East. Britain, which ruled the seas but was weak on land, found allies on the Continent who joined in the struggle now and again, partly in the interest of their own security, as they saw it, and partly to seize opportunities and to reap unfair gains. They were all against France, which had learnt in the Revolution a new strategy of mass armies, long fronts, annihilating blows and psychological warfare, but which was tempted by military superiority into making intolerable claims and conquests. At the same time, however, they were against each other, and did not trust each other; neither Prussia and Austria nor Austria and Russia trusted each other, while the small German states trusted neither Austria nor Prussia. They were all therefore persuaded once or more than once to leave the Grand Alliance and to come to terms with the enemy, France. Prussia did this as early as 1795 and gained ten years of apparently advantageous neutrality, which in the end proved all the more disastrous. Austria did the same in 1797, in 1801 and again in 1805. Russia came to terms with France in 1807. The small German states did so whenever there was an opportunity or they were forced to, which in their case amounted to the same thing. This willingness to desert, this lack of solidarity, was one of the sources of French superiority; thus when in the summer of 1813 all the European powers came together in a reasonably firm alliance for the first time, France could not hold its over-extended lines in Germany, Italy and Spain for as much as three months.

Even fifteen years earlier the French front had been far too extensive. The situation had not been created by General Bonaparte; he had inherited it when he became dictator and was forced

by the dangerous, extreme character of this heritage to go further still. It was impossible to stabilize the situation as it was, with the Netherlands French, the Rhineland French and Switzerland, Italy and Rome all ruled in one way or another by France. Bonaparte went on because he could not stop where he was and because the others, Britain in particular, would not allow him to stop there. He wished for peace and an opportunity to strengthen and enjoy his acquisitions, and was not conscious of lightly starting wars; he always regarded himself as being attacked, provoked and coerced. But when he made peace it was no more than an armistice; either he caused new unrest by ruthlessly sharing his spoils with his enemy, as he did with Austria in Italy as early as 1797, or he imposed conditions which the vanquished were forced to accept for the moment but would certainly evade in the long run.

The armistice periods after the Peace of Lunéville in 1801, the Peace of Pressburg in 1805 and the Peace of Tilsit in 1807 were intervals of political experiment and domestic change which were mostly in line with Bonaparte's ideas; even where reforms were carried out without his help and were secretly aimed against him, they were necessarily influenced by France. Bonaparte or, as he was called after 1804, the Emperor Napoleon, therefore played as central a role in German history as in that of France. The shape of Germany's political, legal and administrative life, which was preserved through the nineteenth century and in many cases until well into the twentieth, was moulded under his spell. Napoleon also gave the Germans new notions of politics, the state, power, war, success and greatness; they accepted these. If it were possible to measure such things at all one might be tempted to claim that the Napoleonic myth later flourished more strongly in Germany and was more effective there than in France. At the end the French saw the Emperor as the loser – an illustrious menace that had been disposed of. For at least a century the Germans thrived on greater hatred of Napoleon and more glowing admiration for him.

Napoleon became curiously deeply involved in German affairs, partly as a result of his own dreams and partly because somehow



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Germany and France have always been deeply involved with one another. An Italian by birth, he got on well with the Italians; he flattered their patriotism and ruled them either directly as King of Italy or through his family. Spain was foreign to him; his attempt to intervene in the life of the Spanish people proved a bad mistake. With Russia he grandly sought to divide Europe and those parts of the Near East that belonged to Europe. In the end he tried to impose his will on Russia by war, probably without knowing how he would have used a victory in 1812. Because Russia was more alien to him even than Spain he was tempted into his mad march to Moscow. His influence on Russian history has been small; what had a lasting influence was not the fact that Napoleon reached Moscow but that the Russians paid him a return visit in Paris, and became the leading continental power. Britain with its well-established, free political life was also foreign to him. Britain remained almost untouched by the French Revolution and afterwards as before went its own way which had been confirmed rather than called in question by the long, victorious duel with 'Boney'. Napoleon felt less at ease with the Germans than with the Italians, but preferred them to the Spaniards and understood them better than the Russians or the British. He respected the Germans but found them weak and malleable in politics; the vision of the 'Empire', its name and its baroque decrepitude, lured him deep into the country where many glittering courts flattered his snobbishness. The old Empire was dissolved on his orders but he immediately created a substitute, the Confederation of the Rhine; and as he ruled on the Rhine and in Italy he could see himself as the true and mighty heir of the medieval Reich, or better still – as his capital lay in Frankish country – as the new Charlemagne. This was a misunderstanding. Nineteenth-century Europe did not want a supra-national 'empire' but nation-states – a development greatly accelerated by the imperial adventure.

In 1801 Austria, and with it the Empire, finally recognized the French Republic and all its conquests in the Rhineland and the Netherlands. The need now arose to compensate those German princes and landowners who had lost their possessions west of the

Rhine. This became the occasion for a basic reorganization of the Reich. The ecclesiastical states, the electorates, the prince-bishoprics and the imperial abbeys and monasteries were secularized. The imperial cities disappeared, and with them – after a new war and a new defeat of Austria in 1806 – a Milky Way of imperial princes, counts and knights. The operation was called ‘mediatization’ because these curiosities which had been under direct imperial control were now incorporated into the larger states of the Empire; but as the Empire itself ceased to exist in 1806 the term ‘mediatization’ soon lost its meaning. The victims of ‘mediatization’ were allowed, as privileged subjects, to remain in their castles, where many of their descendants still live today. The victims of ‘secularization’ were made to leave their monasteries, which either went to ruin or became private property. Churches were closed and looted, works of art were sold at giveaway prices or gathered together in local museums. The spirit of the age was irreligious and anti-clerical; often the number of monks expelled from the monasteries was pathetically small. But if decline begins at the zenith recovery starts at the nadir. In the long run the Catholic Church benefited from the loss at the beginning of the century which transformed it from a rich but often very worldly institution into an impoverished one. The strange clearance sale, formally an internal German affair, was really controlled from Paris. The result was the German states as we have come to know them, and as with a few changes they still exist today: Bavaria, Württemberg, Baden, Hesse.

The programme, looked at through Napoleon’s eyes, had much to be said for it. Something had to be done with Germany; the rotten feudalism of the Reich was anyway incapable of holding out against the new century – a truth of which politically conscious Germans had long been aware. But what at one time had seemed the probable solution, a partition of the German states between Austria and Prussia, was contrary to French policy; even more was the establishment of a German nation-state. As yet the pseudo-emperor could rule southern and western Germany, directly, as he ruled Italy. A small number of German monarchies, artificial enough to be weak, but solid and dignified enough to

satisfy German pride, planets around the imperial sun – that was the plan, and given the situation it was the best possible one. The choice of salvaged dynasties was not inept. In view of the past it was sensible that Bavaria should emerge from the liquidation of the Empire as the greatest of what were later called the *Mittelstaaten*, and even Württemberg, Baden and Hesse had more historical *raisons d'être* than the principalities of Hohenlohe, Fürstenberg or Leiningen which were now under the administration of their more fortunate neighbours. Yet some frontiers were just drawn arbitrarily; there was no need to amalgamate the Palatinate on the right bank of the Rhine with Baden, or Franconia with Bavaria. If for a long time the link between the German states and their ethnic origins had been slight, this legendary character of theirs now vanished completely. Dialects, districts, creeds and historical traditions were intermingled in the new states which could not claim to be anything more than the fulfilment of an abstract political principle.

Some things that owe their existence to accident and arbitrary action stand the test. The German states established by Napoleon stood the test in several ways in the nineteenth century: as administrative units, as training grounds for governments and for parliamentarianism, and as intellectual centres. Yet they were not genuine states in the sense that Switzerland or Holland are. Not one of them ever fought for its existence, not one of them ever dared to go its own way in a crisis. The Bavaria of the Thirty Years War was a genuine, if somewhat limited, political force manoeuvring with caution and deadly earnest between the European powers. After Napoleon, enlarged by countless splinters from the Empire, it was a fair-weather state; it never again dared to venture into a storm or to put itself to the test. It has remained thus to our day.

Napoleon later said that the Germans had been readier for a nation-wide organization than any other European people and that any strong man who felt so inclined could have placed himself at the head of thirty million Germans. It is very understandable that he himself did not want to be this strong man. It was the French tradition to play off the German princes against the

'Empire' or, alternatively, to support the Empire against the most powerful principality. It was also in the dictator's personal interest to surround himself with satellites whose court ceremonial he could imitate as they could imitate his; a procedure which gave the new imperial position a more solid foundation. The paradoxical situation in which Napoleon found himself was that France, which had staged a great national revolution and wanted to set an example for other countries, once it had become an Empire had no use for national revolutions in other countries. But the pseudo-emperor, fumbling for conservative protection and anxious to make his peace with Europe, had no use for real monarchs either. The German princes served his purpose; they appeared to be genuine, legitimate rulers, they bore ancient names, but they were his creatures, who reigned over artificial states and who had all forfeited their claim to be legitimate rulers by their spoliations. Napoleon's dilemma was that in an emergency he could not rely on those who were most useful to him just because they were useful to him in their existing state. Bavaria and Württemberg and Baden, artificial creations, fair-weather states, supported him as long as he brought fair weather. They betrayed him with alacrity, and had no alternative but to betray him, as soon as the 'sun of Austerlitz' ceased to shine.

Napoleon liked to see himself as the man who quelled great storms and settled great historical issues as he chose. But at the turn of the eighteenth century there was no storm in Germany strong enough to sweep away all the rubbish of the past – as patriots of the stature of Freiherr vom Stein were to learn. What happened between 1801 and 1806 was roughly what had already been in the air at the time of Frederick and Joseph: another application of the 'system of partition', a deal between the great princes at the expense of the weak ones. France's newly acquired superiority merely ensured that the main beneficiaries were not, as in the partition of Poland, the two Great Powers, Prussia and Austria, but the new *Mittelstaaten*.

When in 1805 Austria and Russia made what for the time being was the last attempt to check the expansion of the Bonapartist Empire, motivated in equal measure by domestic conflict,

recklessness and fear, easy opportunity and serious threat, the German Reich no longer existed. The armies of the new central German states fought for France. Their rulers renounced their imperial allegiance and assumed the title of King or Grand Duke. This was sensible enough as they could hardly remain Electors when there were no more Roman emperors to elect. But these new kings were even less independent than their predecessors had been. They now depended on the ever-watchful, energetic, clever, merciless Emperor in Paris. No sooner had they proclaimed their independence than they had to take part in proclaiming something else: the foundation of the 'Confederation of the Rhine', a permanent alliance of German states under Napoleon's protection. In practice their armies became units of the great French army; their diplomacy was confined to rivalry for the dictator's favour and to efforts to strengthen their ties with him by family bonds, through which they hoped to acquire still more land, still further illusionary gains in the event of new peace treaties.

The Confederation of the Rhine was intended to be the old Empire without the German Great Powers. Napoleon, always anxious to cloak his rootless power with the magic of age, vainly used various institutions and ceremonies to stress this continuity. How in the long run could Germany and Italy allow themselves to be ruled from Paris? How could post-revolutionary, bourgeois Europe believe in Charlemagne's imperial mantle which a foreign general, a product of the Revolution, claimed to be wearing? The great realist was also a great dreamer. He mistook passing opportunities and advantages for final achievements, confused the tinsel with which he covered the craziest by-products of the war with real gold, and became increasingly entangled in romantic dreams.

On the other side the inevitable happened, not without tragic dignity. The last 'Roman Emperor', Francis III, proclaimed the dissolution of the Empire, released all his former vassals from their obligations and took the title of 'Emperor of Austria', created in 1804. In his *Annalen*, a brief chronological autobiography, Goethe says drily:

'Meanwhile the Confederation of the Rhine had been set up and its consequences were easy to predict; on the way home we

read in the newspapers that the German Empire had been dissolved.' More detached still is the spirit of the entries in his diary for 6 and 7 August 1806:

Seven o'clock in the evening at Hof. Announcement of the proclamation of the Rhenish Confederation and the French Protectorate. Reflections and discussions. Good dinner . . . Quarrel between servant and coachman on the box which excited us more than the dissolution of the Roman Empire.

This was Goethe's general attitude. He had little faith in politics on a big scale and believed only in small, observable spheres of life; to him the burning-down of a farm was more real than the collapse of an 'Empire'. But the historical situation probably contributed to Goethe's indifference. Sentimentalists and students of antiquity might have been moved by the formal end of the 'Roman Empire', but it brought nothing new. Secularization and 'mediatization' had rendered the dead institution a last service, because the ecclesiastical states and imperial cities which vanished in the process had been its only surviving dependencies. For intelligent people the whole institution had long been a joke.

*Das liebe Heilige Römische Reich,
wie hält's nur noch zusammen?**

For centuries it had not held together for any serious purpose. On the other hand the establishment of the Confederation of the Rhine made it clear that the German states, apart from Austria and Prussia, would have to continue to exist together in some form; and the Confederation of the Rhine was followed less than nine years after the dissolution of the Empire by the 'German Confederation'. To draw a modern parallel one might say that the German Confederation was to the old Empire as the United Nations is to the League of Nations, the same thing only a little more effectively organized. Therefore closer inspection shows that the end of the Holy Roman Empire was not the decisive

*The dear old Holy Roman Empire, how on earth does it still hold together?

event which it was later claimed to be. However, purely symbolical factors also play a part in history, and the memory of past imperial glory later did things to the German spirit that the Empire had been unable to do while it was still a pathetic reality at the Diet of Ratisbon. The end of the Empire was associated with the disappearance of old forms and ways of life. It became the symbol for the end of the good old times and the beginning of new ones.

A later generation of nationalistic historians cursed the 'princes' revolution' of the Napoleonic era as an arbitrary, soulless, megalomaniacal, treasonable enterprise imposed by foreign rule; but with the same breath they praised it as progress towards unity and modernity. There is something to be said for both points of view.

Speaking generally, there are three spheres in which the French Revolution affected Germany. The Rhineland was part of France for twenty years and was reformed directly from Paris with firmness and intelligence. The states of the Rhenish Confederation imitated France, though not without adding some local peculiarities. Napoleon left his satellites considerable freedom in the choice of means, provided there was no conflict with his own interests. In Prussia one cannot really speak of imitation, though the French influence was strong. Here the reforms were also an independent, imaginative reaction against the misery of the defeat which necessitated them. In this way the Prussian state proved that it really existed, in spite of all its contradictions and artificialities. It attracted ideas and their originators, men of enthusiasm and ability who came to the rescue from different parts of Germany.

In Cologne, Bonn, Mainz, Speyer and Trier the French ruled, and ruled well. They were not popular, but even the best foreign rulers rarely are. They were not popular as they were in Milan, but they were not hated as they were in Madrid. Sensible, well-organized administrative units replaced outmoded imperial cities, minute feudal states and theocratic principalities. Napoleon's government was both absolute and liberal. Absolute because orders came from above, because the immense bureaucratic

machinery was directed by the Emperor and his ministers; liberal because everybody was equal before the law, Christian and Jew, knight, burgher and peasant, and because under the law everybody was free to live the way he liked. Absolutism of this kind must in the end defeat itself. Successful citizens, industrialists, merchants, bankers and landowners will sooner or later want to take part in Government. In the long run the influence of France's liberalism and not its absolutism predominated in the Rhineland – as Prussia discovered when after Napoleon's fall it established its own government in Cologne and Coblenz. Twenty years, and such eventful years, are a long time. The Rhineland has never again been simply 'German' like some small provincial town in Thuringia.

In southern Germany the surviving states, Bavaria, Württemberg and Baden, set to work with a will. Nothing remained undone that might serve to destroy established institutions: schools were taken over by the government, churches were placed under state control and transformed into national churches on the French pattern, class privileges were abolished, the newly acquired territories became administrative districts or departments in the style of French *départements*, legal systems were simplified and modelled directly on the *Code Napoléon* or revised in its absolutist yet bourgeois spirit, expert ministries with administrative hierarchies were set up, old universities reorganized and new ones founded, and Protestant scholars were brought in to annoy ultra-Catholic populations. In short, everything that still remained of the old *Reich* and might have affected the sovereignty of the new 'empire' was completely eradicated. Parliamentary representation of the kind tolerated by Napoleon in Paris was promised but did not eventuate because of the war.

The peoples of Europe have always learned from each other, and imitation is not necessarily foolish. The state founded by the Normans in England in 1066 was a Franco-Norman one but it became the basis of the English state. Therefore it is a mistake retrospectively to condemn the new German *Mittelstaaten* because they were created during the French period and in the French spirit. Among their founders were violent and grotesque

personalities like the first king of Württemberg, as well as noble men like the Prime Minister of Baden, Reitzenstein, and the Bavarian lawyer Anselm Feuerbach. The 'princes' revolution' was not as barren of ideas nor as brutal as Heinrich von Treitschke claims. Someone had to start it and even in southern Germany someone had to introduce a sensible system of government; given the way in which German history had developed the 'people' could not do it. Subsequently the south German states fulfilled their duties tolerably well and became centres of a liberal movement for which the achievements of the first ten years provided at least the framework. Yet they never completely overcame the strange conditions of their beginning; a slightly foreign air continued to pervade the new groupings, the new hierarchies and the cultural splendour of the restored capitals. This may help to explain the weakness which the *Mittelstaaten* demonstrated in every future crisis. Just over a century after the 'princes' revolution' its beneficiaries, the dynasties, were forced to retire without a hand being lifted in their defence; long before, they had lost any real influence over the shaping of the nation's destiny. Generally speaking, therefore, the end of the old Empire was the beginning of the nation-state, though the road to it first led to the complete, if ephemeral, triumph of the principalities. They became too important, too modern for the old dynastic system, but they were incapable of ever becoming popular states in their own right.

Very different was Prussia's history during this period. Prussia had retired from the war in 1795. Since then, under the peace treaty of Basle, it had enjoyed a neutrality together with the rest of northern and central Germany. For the capital, Berlin, and for smaller capitals, like Weimar, this was an intellectually fertile period. It was the beautiful period of the friendship between Schiller and Goethe, when every year brought a play by Schiller, a story by Jean Paul, and when Berlin society accomplished some tremendous intellectual feats. It was the great decade of German literature. This creativeness undoubtedly had something to do with the long period of peace in the midst of wars. 'The world was on fire everywhere', Goethe reported in his *Annalen*, 'Europe had changed shape, cities and navies were being destroyed on land and

sea, but central and northern Germany profited from a certain feverish peace which enabled us to enjoy a doubtful safety.' The state itself used its neutrality as states were wont to do: at the beginning for another joint piece of robbery with Russia which brought it vast Polish territories, including the capital Warsaw, and later to make big profits from secularization.

Suddenly these doubtful advantages were lost again. Having made the mistake of not taking part in the resistance against French expansion for eleven years, Prussia made the mistake of joining it at the most unfavourable moment, in the autumn of 1806; whereupon Napoleon destroyed the antiquated Prussian war machine with incredible rapidity. He regarded the Prussian system as more dangerous than the south German one, though at the same time sufficiently artificial to be easily destroyed. This is what he wanted to do after the Prussian defeats of 1806-7, but even then he was not free to play the game entirely as he wished. He now decided to come to terms with Russia, the power which only a few months earlier he had accused of being non-European and barbarian. The Tsar preferred to preserve a rump-Prussia between the two Empires, his own and that of his new friend. The result was not a success. Prussia's Polish loot became the 'Grand Duchy of Warsaw' which was part of Napoleon's system and contained the promise of a future Polish nation-state; therefore it could not fail to be doubly unwelcome to the Russian imperialists. The Prussian territories west of the Elbe also came under French influence and were consolidated into a new satellite state. Between French Poland and French Westphalia there came to lie a bisected Prussian state, substantial enough never to become reconciled to existing conditions, and able to reform itself and to salvage for better days what remained of its old tradition. It is easy to say that Napoleon's arrangement was a serious mistake. In retrospect his whole history is a succession of mistakes; there was no 'right' course of action.

The Prussian collapse of 1806 and the unkind treatment meted out by the victor to the victim had an unfavourable effect on Franco-Prussian or Franco-German relations. Because Prussia had lost where the south German states had gained and because

it continued to be tormented by the victor, the reform of the state took on an anti-French accent. Whereas southern Germany was officially on most cordial terms with Napoleon Prussia was barely on speaking terms with him; its best citizens secretly began to dream of a war of liberation. As at the moment there were no territorial gains for Prussia to assimilate but only losses to be put up with, the Prussian reform was devoid of hate and violence. The state was there, a state already put on a rational footing by Hohenzollern absolutism; it could therefore afford to adopt a creative approach.

The chief factor was that outstanding individuals chose to serve Prussia. 'Men make history', said a German historian. Sometimes this is true and sometimes not. In this case it is more or less true. In Prussia no changes were brought about by the masses; they came from above or not at all. They came from enlightened bureaucrats and soldiers, East Prussians who had been influenced by Kant or men from the *Reich*, from Hanover, Westphalia and Nassau, who for one reason or another had been attracted into the Prussian civil service. The best among them, after whom all the reforms are usually called, was Freiherr vom Stein. He deserves his reputation, this powerful, proud, warm-hearted and good man. Born an imperial knight in a region where the tradition of the *Reich* was comparatively strong, he felt that his only obligation was to the Empire which no longer existed. This state of affairs Stein regarded as temporary and illegal. He was interested in Germany's two Great Powers because for the time being they alone could be real German states. The rest, the 'sultans' as he called them, from Bavaria to Nassau-Usingen, he looked on with characteristic intolerance. They must all disappear – he did not exactly know how; nor did he know how the survivors, Prussia and Austria, could exist side by side. Stein was no diplomat and was contemptuous of the skills of the diplomat. He had begun as a practical man, as an inspector of mines, and had for many years been in close touch with industrial development; mere theorizing and penmanship he regarded as unworthy of a man. He never missed an opportunity of thundering against the 'overvaluation of the speculative sciences'. 'The strange, the incomprehensible

attracts the attention of the human mind which indulges in idle brooding instead of taking firm action.' As he grew older, Stein the technician, the administrator and founder of industries did not lack tremendous political ambition. He was what many think they are but only few manage to become: a patriot. For him Germany was something noble and precious. For the liberation of Germany from French rule he was ready to sacrifice his money, his possessions and his life. The reforms which he was allowed to make in Prussia in 1807-3 were in the last resort intended to serve the cause of liberation.

There are many aspects to Stein's reforms. Politicians are not ideas incarnate or walking textbooks; woe betide us if they claim to be anything of the kind. Doctrinaire statesmen will always bring with them two things: tyranny and defeat. Stein was no doctrinaire but he had strong yearnings and sympathies, one of which drew him to the Holy Roman Empire and the Middle Ages. He was attracted by the idea of the old system of estates, of well distributed privileges and obligations, of a Christian aristocracy patriotically doing its duty, of self-governing cities, of corporations, churches and universities administering their property in the common interest. He may have idealized all this in the fashion of those days but he was also a modern man who believed in the educational and moral function of government. The purpose of good government was to educate citizens to educate themselves, or at any rate to take an organized part in public life so that the state lived from within and so that there could be no repetition of the deplorable collapse of 1806. People should be able freely to follow their occupations as in France. Stein's appreciation of both medieval corporative and modern liberal ideas need not be regarded as contradictory. Many lines of development converged in the trend which in the later nineteenth century was called 'liberal'. It is possible to trace one such trend back to the Middle Ages: modern English parliamentary government grew out of the old system of estates. Stein admired England and would have been very upset if it had been demonstrated to him, as it could have been, that his actions were influenced by French revolutionary ideas.

Stein's ideas crossed with other, newer ones: the demand for

free trade as it had come from England, the concept of man as *homo oeconomicus* whose urge for profits needed only to be freed from all government restrictions in order to produce ever greater quantities of wealth and happiness in free competition. This emphasis on free trade became more marked when after a year Stein had to resign and to leave the country. In his letters he had carelessly referred to a future war of liberation. His successor, Hardenberg, lacked Stein's idealism.

The peasants were emancipated, but the landowners kept their police powers and the right to deal with minor offences in their districts; in order to provide compensation for the old services and payments in kind the land was divided up, with the result that hundreds of thousands of peasants were unable to find an independent existence. Against Stein's wishes, but in line with the aims of his free-trade assistants, this policy (*Bauernlegen* – 'laying the peasants flat' – was the German term) made serfs into farm workers and their sons and grandsons into urban labourers. The Prussian aristocracy emerged from the period of reform unbroken, in the long run enriched and made politically conscious. Henceforth all occupations were open to its members, they were allowed to acquire any kind of property, not just land, and preserved some of their written privileges as well as some of those which were unwritten; service in the army, administration and at court was no longer exclusive to them, but their chances of advancement were better than those of others.

Stein's personal attitude towards the aristocracy was ambivalent. He belonged to it himself and was proud of his ancestry and arrogant. On the other hand, his experiences with the Prussian aristocracy filled him with contemptuous impatience and there came a time when he would have liked to do away with it altogether. His ideal was the English aristocracy, rich but with a sense of responsibility, continually revived by the elevation of members of the middle class to the peerage, rendering valuable political service in the House of Lords, and so constituted that titles passed only to a single heir, while younger sons joined the ranks of the middle class. In Germany every son inherited a title, even if there was nothing else to inherit – a circumstance which

now made itself all the more painfully felt because the expropriation of the Catholic Church had deprived the aristocracy of the richest source of income for its younger sons.

In the city democracy begins with Freiherr vom Stein, though the word was still taboo. He was the founder of self-administration by elected town councils. Of his achievements this one has proved the most enduring. Even in the twentieth century Prussian cities aroused the admiration of the world, and were models of the way in which public welfare services should be run. But even at the beginning of the twentieth century – and particularly then – the contrast between municipal democracy and the semi-absolutism of the state was striking. Historically it is due to the fact that less than half of Stein's reforms were successful, that he was able to reorganize the cities but not the state. National representation, which he saw as the crowning achievement of his work, was not introduced.

The great soldiers who now took charge of the army also set out to make this institution more democratic, or perhaps we should say, to give it a national basis, to imbue it with patriotic spirit and to put merit before hereditary privilege. The principle of universal conscription was proclaimed though not fully applied, because of the restrictions which Napoleon imposed on the Prussian army, which were, however, cunningly and secretly defied whenever possible. Mass armies had been the creation of the French Revolution; Napoleon had disciplined them and used them for his strategy of destruction. In the long run the new spirit and the new means could not remain the exclusive property of France. Intellectually the Prussian military reformers, Scharnhorst, Gneisenau, Clausewitz, are the equals of Carnot and Saint-Cyr; they had greater respect for the human being than Napoleon. It was probably inevitable that, having taken over the people's army, they should also take over Napoleon's strategy of destruction, the whole new, uncompromising philosophy of politics and war as a 'continuation of politics by other means'. We may consider it a misfortune that they went to school with Napoleon, but it was Napoleon who built the school and forced the pupils to attend.

It is doubtful how much of Scharnhorst's and Gneisenau's

basically humanitarian spirit was absorbed by the army and survived. An outstanding individual can make suggestions, but whether they are realized is another matter. This is particularly true if his ideas concern the army, an institution whose purpose is to kill and which is and must always remain based on brutal customs, on command and obedience. Napoleon's philosophy of war, impressively summarized in General von Clausewitz's famous *Vom Kriege* (On War), remained the philosophy of the Prussian general staff, more so after the middle of the century. The long-term effect of Scharnhorst's liberal and humane ideas is less clear. Old Prussian class traditions later re-emerged in the army and blended with new forms of discipline, new technical skills and brutalities.

What survives, in the history of states, of the intellectual efforts of outstanding men? If they write books, then books survive, appeals by one individual to other individuals which sometimes produce an effect even centuries later. But what happens when they leave their study and become involved in the difficult, always disappointing work of political leadership? The same question might be asked about the school and university reform which constitutes one chapter of Prussian innovations after 1807 – though this is by definition an intellectual sphere, in which the influence of an eminent minister or organizer ought therefore to be more effective than in the army. Wilhelm von Humboldt, who was Minister of Education in the years of reform, was almost too good to be true. He was a great humanist, an active philologist, a political philosopher, experienced in the ways of the world and cosmopolitan in outlook – his patriotism came late and never really suited him – a pleasure-loving egoist who wanted to make his life a work of art and did not grudge his fellow citizens the things that he had himself. Such a man at the head of the educational system is difficult to fit into the conventional picture, or caricature, of Prussia. It was an extraordinary time and it gave extraordinary men a chance. Under Humboldt's guidance there developed the Prussian school system as it remained to our day: elementary education for all, classical education for the middle classes and the civil servants, universities as institutions for

scientific research and teaching. Education was not thought of as what it later tended to become in Germany, a means of hardening class differences, nor was it thought of as vocational training, but simply as free, classical education. How far it was ever possible to achieve this aim is open to question. But it was more nearly achieved in the first half of the nineteenth century than in the second, and more nearly in either half than in the twentieth century.

The Prussian educational system was intended as the antithesis of the strict, highly centralized and militarized hierarchy of the Napoleonic school system, just as Stein's municipal order was intended as the antithesis of French central government control of local authorities. In the same spirit the new Prussian army was more democratic than the French, which permitted substitution or buying-out, and which had lost its original character through conquest, occupation and the addition of foreign units. Stein's reforms were not mere copies of French revolutionary innovations; they were creative even when they borrowed from the enemy. But after a time the reforming movement largely came to a halt. The moments in history in which noble enthusiasm reigns are short and one must be grateful for any lasting achievement from such a period.

3. Cosmopolitans and Nationalists

European politics in the nineteenth century fed on the French Revolution. No idea, no dream, no fear, no conflict appeared which had not been worked through in that fateful decade: democracy and socialism, reaction, dictatorship, nationalism, imperialism, pacifism. The same can be said of Germany's intellectual history in the nineteenth century in relation to these ten or twenty years. What came later signified development, variation, imitation, or decline, by comparison with the creative originality of the turn of the century.

This creativeness was not a consequence or product of the Revolution; to regard it as such would mean attributing too much importance to political events. Kant, Goethe, Herder and the young Schiller had appeared long before the great wave of unrest swept across Europe. The connections between the one and the other are mysterious, but it cannot be pure coincidence that, while France was enacting its political drama and its youthful generals and organizers were conquering the Continent, an unprecedented wealth of intellectual talent appeared all over Germany, in Prussia and Silesia, in sterile Berlin itself, in the Rhineland and in Swabia. Even if we regard the potentialities as given, the form in which they realized themselves was affected by the events of the day, by the *Zeitgeist*, the spirit of the age – a term which was first used and whose significance was first felt at this period. Though the country was still sparsely populated and news travelled slowly – in that technical sense we are today subject to incomparably greater pressures – men like Fichte, Schleiermacher and Hegel, Görres and Arndt, Gentz, Adam Müller and Kleist, Brentano and Arnim took a serious and intense interest in their time; without its fateful events they might have chosen other roads.

For the great neo-humanists, or classicists as they were later called, the degeneration of the Revolution confirmed the opinions which they had come to hold. When the Committee of Public Safety ruled in Paris Schiller was no longer the poet of *Die Räuber* and *Kabale und Liebe* nor Goethe the young German patriot of 1770. Goethe as Minister of State had good judgement and sound political instincts but he was not a theorist; he was most at home in the era of late, highly enlightened, benevolent princely absolutism. He found the drama of the Revolution interesting, but strange and repulsive; there was nothing in it that he wished either to identify himself with, or to oppose. He was more interested in Napoleon and his legal order in Europe, while it lasted.

*Zur Nation zu bilden, ihr hofft es, Deutsche, vergebens.
Bildet statt dessen, ihr könnt es, freier zu Menschen
euch aus . . .**

*In vain do you hope, Germans, to make yourselves into a nation. Make yourselves – you can do it – into freer human beings instead . . .

Schiller turned away from the Revolution after the execution of Louis XVI, but one cannot say that he ceased to regard politics as the greatest of all human concerns. The Wallenstein trilogy, that noble masterpiece, contains profounder thoughts about the struggle for power, leadership, rebellion, order and chaos, war and peace, than any other German play. And *Wilhelm Tell*, the last play which he finished, is still a hymn of praise for tyrannicide, freedom, nation and fatherland.

Nineteenth-century national-democratic rhetoric found plenty of material in all these things, although Schiller was no longer a democrat when Bonaparte's star rose and no longer primarily interested in the social order. His main concern now became education, the purpose of which to him was to train not nationally conscious but noble, free human beings, educated by recreation, art, beauty and philosophy to become better citizens. Schiller spent his most productive and his most settled and most celebrated years under the protection of Prussian neutrality. He died before it collapsed and we must not ask how he would have behaved during the subsequent times of humiliation and revolt.

The development of his friend, Wilhelm von Humboldt, might give us a clue. For a while Humboldt continued to devote his attention to education as a means of turning the individual into a nobler human being, and to improving his own in Spain or in Rome, wherever interest and opportunity took him. In those days he claimed that he was not interested in Germany and that his true home was a small circle of like-minded friends. The Prussian collapse of 1806 does not appear to have moved him greatly. Later, Humboldt became a politician, first as Prussian Minister of Education and then as a diplomat. As such he defended the interests of his state – vigorously when it became a question of translating victories into territorial gains and power. He adopted a decidedly anti-French attitude and admitted that Prussia had a role to play in Germany, although at the time of the Congress of Vienna he did not regard the establishment of a single German state as desirable. The cosmopolitan had become a patriot. It is possible to be both, because both ways of thinking relate to the human being and the human community, the one

directly, the other through the nation. For a long time yet it was taken for granted that free nations would live better together than unfree principalities, and that a confederation of peoples would crown the work of liberation. The French Revolution itself was both cosmopolitan and nationalist. It needed a succession of unhappy concatenations – the absolute state and the national state, class rule and the democratic army, the competing claims of several nationalities on the same territory – to transform the patriotism of the early nineteenth century into aggressive, oppressing nationalism. Perhaps we should simply say that up till now man has distorted every idea by his all too human actions, and that this is not the fault of the idea but of man himself; just as he misused the Christian religion of charity for the most horrible persecutions, the careful cultivation of national characteristics degenerated into a murderous undertaking.

Of all this almost nothing was noticeable in Napoleon's time. The first who steeped themselves in their own people's history and national character were pure in spirit; they did not cease to be cosmopolitans because they came to believe in the nation.

Joseph Görres for example had begun as a revolutionary and delighted in the collapse of the rule of church and aristocracy in the Rhineland; he had rushed to Paris as the representative of his countrymen to arrange the union of the Rhineland with France. What he saw there disappointed him, as he had already been disappointed by the reality of French military rule in Coblenz. Napoleon's government and character disappointed him still further, even though they made a deep impression on him. He gave up politics temporarily and devoted himself to scientific, philosophical and philological research and speculation. In Heidelberg he met a talented pair of friends, Clemens Brentano from Frankfurt and the Prussian Achim von Arnim. The three threw themselves into the study of the German Middle Ages, folk songs, fairy tales, sagas and paintings. In the fruits of their research, Görres's *Deutsche Volksbücher* and *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* by Arnim and Brentano, they wanted to open new horizons to their countrymen, to offer them comfort and beauty. The periodical which Arnim published in Heidelberg was called *Tröst*

Einsamkeit (Comfort in Solitude), a 'paper for hermits, old and new sagas and prophecies, stories and poems'. There was something of a protest against the prosaic, violent, military present in such intellectual adventures. Later the word 'romantic', which was used loosely to describe the poets and thinkers of the period, came to mean escape from the present, longing for a better bygone age, absorption in dreams, and immersion in the depths of the past and of the soul, and spiritual freedom.

*Mondbeglänzte Zaubernacht,
die den Sinn gefangenhält,
wunderbare Märchenwelt
steig auf in der alten Pracht!**

Novalis, Brentano, Arnim and Tieck wrote beautiful poems. They created a magic garden for the Germans in which new gardeners continued to labour until the middle of the century. But this was another world from that of society and politics, and for our purposes we should not be discussing it. Except that even here there were links with politics. It was the German Middle Ages that attracted the poets, German songs and epics that were republished – of a kind that Frederick the Great would still have scornfully rejected as 'barbaric stuff'. Frederick knew of no German fatherland, but Görres, Arnim and Heinrich von Kleist were patriots, and their activities, however exalted they were and sounded, were a denial of Napoleon's international military rule. What began as a flight from the present, therefore, affected them as well, and subsequently affected them very profoundly. We see Görres later as a powerful nationalistic publicist, Kleist as a perspicacious politician, though emotionally unstable, and the proud, handsome von Arnim as the founder of a 'Christian Round Table' in Berlin, hostile to Stein's reforms, hostile to the French – and even hostile to the Jews. The mind of the individual is not a textbook, it is full of contradictions. In times of excitement writers change faster than in normal times (if normal times

*Moonlit magic night which captivates the senses, fairy-tale world, arise in pristine splendour!

have ever existed), and the dividing line between what is reprehensible and what is noble is frequently not very clear.

The Germans certainly could not remain as innocently peace-loving and cosmopolitan as they had been in Kant's day. Napoleon had taught them too roughly what power was and what the reward of weakness. The misery of state and nation made them discover state and nation, though they still approached the new problems with high idealism. Johann Gottlieb Fichte, that profound thinker and argumentative but touchingly honourable man, presents a curious example of this.

Fichte believed in man and humanity and probably also in God with a seriousness that only a few no-longer-Christians have shown. He believed in the spirit as creator of all things which are nothing without it, and in the right of the individual to develop himself properly in freedom. At the beginning he believed with stern enthusiasm in the French Revolution. From the right of the individual he came to the state as the omnipotent agent which alone could guarantee that right, and from there he quickly arrived at what today is called the totalitarian state, the state as unrestricted ruler of education and economic life. From the all-powerful state he finally came to the nation and the nation-state. Fichte reached this point in his *Reden an die deutsche Nation* (Addresses to the German Nation), delivered in Berlin at the time of the French occupation. He was still an idealist, and he still thought it the nation's task to promote human welfare and regarded a league of nations as the final goal. But now he saw as the media of the *Weltgeist*, world spirit, the nations and above all the German people whom he regarded as the only genuine, original people in a corrupted world. This was nonsense; Fichte did not know the world, and what he told the Germans about their task in it was pure invention. But he was a great orator and made a deep impression on his audiences and later on his readers. The superficial, brazen phrases about the German nature that would save the world, in vogue a hundred years later, were late consequences of the work begun by Fichte and his friends – consequences which his inflexible character would certainly have rejected with scorn.

Others were less subtle thinkers than Fichte, and their road to nationalism was less steep, for example that of Ernst Moritz Arndt who was nevertheless an honest man and a good writer. Others again were imbeciles, like Friedrich Ludwig Jahn, who carried Teutomania to ludicrous and nauseous extremes, although there may have been a sound element in his gymnastics. Another was a great storyteller and dramatist, but he was a sick man – and sick he would probably have been even without Napoleon. Yet men readily blame their times for the demon in their own soul and transfer their self-hatred to a political object. It was thus that Heinrich von Kleist hated the French conqueror, calling upon the Germans:

*Schlagt sie tot! Das Weltgericht
Fragt Euch nach den Gründen nicht!**

The Emperor in his distant capital did less to stop this incipient German nationalism than one would expect in our age of 'ideological warfare'; in fact he did nothing. Whereas Paris journalists had to write what he wanted, the German metaphysicians – 'the Kants and the German enthusiasts', as he called them – could do what they liked. As long as his actions did not run counter to the spirit of the age – and he had confidence in himself in this respect – these men could not harm him.

The desire to read and to study [said Joseph Görres] is not checked, and the government is afraid only of material opposition; literature has long been looked upon as the nation's toy which nobody will even try to take away from her. To suppress national character is not the Emperor's way . . . It is the fact that he cannot find any true national character in the Germans that has puzzled him about this nation.

Fichte could make speeches and Jahn take his gymnasts for walks as long as they did not openly incite to rebellion. In Napoleon's opinion they were not the stuff that political destiny is made of.

*Strike them dead! At the last judgement you will not be asked for your reasons!

4. The Fall of Napoleon and his Legacy

Napoleon's empire with its annexed provinces, its petty kingdoms, its satellites and compulsory allies was an interlude that could not last, a weird by-product of the factors which created it and then destroyed it again. By far the most important of these was the Anglo-French duel. Because Britain refused to recognize the frontiers established by pre-revolutionary France, the annexation of Belgium and the conquest of Holland, the duel went on. Again and again Britain found allies on the Continent whom Napoleon was compelled to defeat, and subject to conditions designed to make it impossible for them to begin again; the very kind of conditions to which they could not become reconciled. He then tried, in vain, to live in peace and friendship with them. Unable to hit Britain directly he wanted to hit the British economy by closing the markets of Europe to British industry. To carry out this unnatural programme he believed that he needed direct control over coasts and ports – Holland, Hamburg, Italy and Dalmatia – and to make them part of France. The 'Continental System', the source of much violence, hatred and corruption, caused more misery on the Continent than in Britain. So did the war against Austria in 1809, the never-ending Spanish war, and the strain on Napoleon's compulsory allies of having to be everlastingly prepared for war. Yet the Emperor was not conscious of being an oppressor of nations. He did not wish to torment and exploit them, least of all the Germans, for whom – or for whose rulers at any rate – he had genuine feelings of friendship and obligation. He thought he knew the middle classes, for whom he provided modern institutions. The ephemeral episode of the 'Empire', the unification of Europe under a new Charlemagne, he regarded as something permanent. Opposition – the revolt of the Spaniards, the papal excommunication, the diplomatically careful refusal first of Austria and then of Russia to fall in with his plans, the anger of the Germans rumbling secretly under the surface of obedience – he regarded as mere ideology, revolutionary nonsense, an irritating misunderstanding of the course of history. In

1812 when he led his Grand Army against Russia he believed that as a good European he was waging war to end war; after this there would be peace. What such a man himself believes in such a situation is of little importance historically.

Neither are we here concerned with his much-admired personal achievement: how one man controlled Europe, the object of his selfish extravagant imagination, through his officers, how he ruled from Madrid to Moscow, how he mobilized vast armies with no better means to move them about than the Romans, and how, in giving his orders, he always kept an eye on the propaganda effects. Nothing fitted in his system; one tear and it fell apart everywhere. What defeated him? Britain did. And also Russia, its people and its geography and climate. Then there was Austrian diplomacy which determined his defeat in the summer of 1813. Further, he was defeated by himself, because he was not prepared to make concessions, because, to use Metternich's phrase, he 'would not let himself be saved'. Austria would gladly have let him off lightly if he had been prepared voluntarily to abandon control of Germany, Italy and Spain. Finally, Germany too was responsible for his defeat. His collapse occurred on German soil; in the decisive battle of Leipzig the vital part was played by Prussian and Austrian troops.

Nevertheless Germany did not play a main role in the War of Liberation, which was a European, primarily a joint Anglo-Russian enterprise. Napoleon's disaster in Russia was the inevitable beginning; the next decisive event was the Tsar's decision to carry the war beyond his own frontiers into Germany. In this, however, he was influenced by the advice of the great German emigrant at the Tsarist court, Freiherr vom Stein, and the Convention of Tauroggen by which a Prussian auxiliary unit of the French army under General Yorck proclaimed its neutrality, the revolt of East Prussia and Prussia's gradual move towards the Russian camp – all these are vital links in the chain. Afterwards diplomacy regained the upper hand. In Prussia east of the Elbe there was enthusiasm, and there it is possible to speak of a popular rising. Coolly calculating, Austria joined the alliance in order not to be left out and in order to remain master of the situation

and so prevent the real change desired by the patriots round Stein. The states of the Confederation of the Rhine stayed with Napoleon until just before the battle of Leipzig or after it. Then, willingly or reluctantly, they made a dignified move into the victors' camp, where they were received politely in spite of their sinful past; each side needed the other and each could after all accuse the other of much the same things. Non-German historians have sometimes commented sarcastically on the quiet attitude of the Germans during the crisis of Napoleon's final agony, so unlike the popular fury of the Spaniards or the Russians. How difficult it is to please everyone. If the nation had really followed Kleist's call: 'Strike them dead! At the last judgement . . .' it would be accused of typically German barbarism and treachery instead of typically German timidity and civic obedience.

The Prussian army proved its mettle. It was now a popular force, the great reserve army of the *Landwehr* which many volunteers flocked to join; new patriotic and xenophobic songs were heard and, though belatedly and restrained by diplomacy and the habit of obedience, war was waged against the oppressor. These factors gave the war of 1813-14 a new character, symbolized by the Order of the Iron Cross. It was an adventure which stimulated the imagination - that wintry march 'across the Rhine into France' under the spectacular leadership of the aged Marshal Blücher. Napoleon's last stand against merciless superiority, his incredible return from Elba, and the battle of Waterloo - decided by the Prussians - seemed to the Germans like a last judgement and increased their national self-confidence.

There was a difference between the aims of the patriots, the leaders of the Prussian army, Stein and his propagandists, and the achievements of the diplomats. This difference became more obvious as the day of final victory approached. Stein, Görres, Arndt and the many other enthusiastic readers of the new *Rheinischer Merkur* wanted a great German empire with an emperor at its head and with corporative institutions. They wanted to chase away the princes of the Confederation of the Rhine, of Bavaria, Saxony and Württemberg. They also demanded that as a punishment France be made to return at least the former

imperial provinces of Alsace and Lorraine, insisting on the severest possible terms to cure once and for all the desire for war. The diplomats did not want this; neither the cool-headed Clemens Metternich who now directed Austria's foreign policy with masterly skill, nor the south German rulers, nor even the Prussian Prime Minister, Hardenberg. None of them regarded a new 'Reich' as either desirable or obtainable, or wanted to complement the French Revolution by a German one. The order which they established after the collapse of Napoleon's system was called a 'restoration', which fundamentally it was not; indeed on closer inspection restorations usually prove to be merely on the surface. The fact that some of the princes deposed by Napoleon were allowed to return to their thrones did not affect the social, or even the diplomatic changes of the Revolution. What happened at the Congress of Vienna in 1815 was not that pre-Napoleonic Europe was restored but that Napoleonic Europe was divided, with the result that Austria now ruled where France had ruled in Italy, Prussia ruled where France had ruled on the Rhine, and Russia ruled where France had ruled in Poland. There had been many partitions, but the country which for twenty years had taken the lion's share now had to give back everything to be divided so as to establish an equilibrium of power. Napoleon, who quickly saw through the true war aims of his opponents, had reason from his point of view to be indignant. They pretended to be fighting for justice against the great criminal but wanted to continue his system after their own fashion and to benefit from it.

It was impossible to return to pre-1792 conditions or to create democratic nation-states in Germany and Italy. The emergence of such states would have entailed the self-destruction of Prussia and Austria and an internal movement of Jacobin energy and scale which did not exist. What did exist were disappointed, angry patriots, among them influential writers, but no popular movement to realize their dreams. Not only did the old powers, headed by Austria and Prussia, triumph once again but they needed to do almost nothing to suppress the disappointed nationalists. They had only discreetly to establish *faits accomplis*. The result was that the German states remained as Napoleon had created them.

The 'princes' revolution' of 1801-6 was neither undone nor continued.

It would have been excellent if at Napoleon's fall Germany had become a state, a national republic, a democracy; the nineteenth century would then have taken a different course and we should not be where we are today. But to speak of missed opportunities is meaningful only where genuine opportunities existed, which was not the case in 1815 either in Germany or in Italy.

But because the recent past had shown how easily a divided Germany could become a temptation for its neighbours, a battle field and a place for oppression, and probably also because some small concession to the nationalists was felt to be expedient, the Congress of Vienna set up the German Confederation. The Confederation was at least better planned than the old Empire in which there had been no question of plan or purpose. What was dissolved in 1806 was a very badly organized federation of German states, with all kinds of useless and antiquated encumbrances. What was recreated in 1815 was a better organized federation of German states whose constitution took account of realities instead of concealing them beneath fiction. For this reason the Confederation was intended to preserve not only the 'external and internal safety of Germany' but specifically also the 'independence and inviolability of the individual German states'. There was to be a Federal Diet in Frankfurt - formerly the town where the Emperor was crowned and now once more a Free City - to which governments would send their representatives and which would be so constituted that the two biggest states could not outvote the smaller ones, nor the other way round. If it chose to, the Federal Diet should be able to determine joint economic and tariff policy, assimilate judicial systems and organize joint defence. The Federal Act provided member states with advice of a somewhat vague mandatory nature on internal government and the political rights of citizens. These member states were now 'sovereign', although in fact they were more loyal to the Confederation in the decades to come than they had been to the Empire in the eighteenth century. The federal constitution met their interests and

views. The equation between the written word and reality was correct – for a time.

Some inter-German territorial changes had preceded the preparation of the constitution, though only one was sufficiently important to be worth mentioning here: the reconstitution of the Prussian state. Because the victor of 1812, the liberator of Europe, the Russian Tsar, wanted to have Poland, Prussia once more had to surrender its Polish share of the booty of 1795. However, as one of the victors it was entitled to rule over at least as many 'souls' as before 1806 and therefore compensation had to be found in Germany. Because the Rhineland could no more remain part of France than return to its pre-revolutionary, antiquated constitution its people were simply told that henceforth they were Prussians. The same news was given to the inhabitants of the western part of Saxony. Only as a result of these two acquisitions, the 'Rhine Province' and the 'Province of Saxony', did Prussia become a predominantly German state straddling diagonally across the country and stretching far to the south, and was thus put in a position to preside over German history in the nineteenth century. Whether this could or should have been foreseen in 1814 is difficult to say. A few Cassandras did foresee it.

In 1814, however, the issue was not to protect Germany against Prussia or Europe against Germany, but Germany and Europe against a new French revolutionary attack. This aim was served by a strong Kingdom of the Netherlands – the union of Belgium and Holland – and by a strong Prussia on the Rhine.

In retrospect it is easy to prophesy and to show diplomats where they went wrong; working under the pressure of the moment their task is more difficult. In the longer run they can never do the right thing, for at some point their decisions always have unwelcome consequences. The situation is particularly difficult after the victory of allies over their former conqueror. If their new system is aimed against the vanquished enemy so as to prevent a recurrence of danger from that direction, they are later blamed for failing to see that the threat came from another direction. Yet if they turn at once against the new danger it will be said that as soon as they had achieved their first paltry objective they

destroyed and betrayed the great alliance which could have maintained lasting peace and happiness. The 'horsetrading in provinces' that went on at the Congress of Vienna later became the object of liberal loathing. It was said that the people were not consulted before their states were divided and territorial losses were made good by territorial gains. Later experience has shown that plebiscites are not an infallible way of drawing frontiers or creating states, and mass expulsions even less. The methods of 1815 compare reasonably well with the artificial ones of 1919 and the barbarous ones of 1945. In 1815 no ethnic group was asked which state it wished to belong to, but none was expelled. What was consulted were the interests of both European and internal German equilibrium or peace; after all there were other ways of taking account of popular feeling without misused plebiscites. The majority benefited from the change or remained unaffected; a minority later found it annoying or almost unbearable. The second effect had not been foreseen by the peacemakers of 1815; any more than they foresaw a revision of their work. They regarded the new order as static and sensible, not as dynamic and 'historic'. After years of chaos they wanted at last to establish permanent order, even a kind that did not satisfy everybody. Our world is not, after all, such that any one order could ever satisfy everybody.

Of the three German political systems the Austrian, the Prussian and the 'third' (that of the *Mittelstaaten* or the Confederation of the Rhine) the Prussian emerged as the most popular from the Napoleonic catastrophe. This is curious, because most of the time, that is until 1809, Austria rather than Prussia had been the centre of German resistance against Napoleon and could most validly claim the old imperial legacy. At first, however, it was not a question of time but of the impact of recent events. What had aroused enthusiasm in the War of Liberation had worn Prussian and not Austrian colours. The Prussian army leaders overshadowed the cunning Austrian generalissimo. Stein himself, although he was and in his heart remained stateless, had once, at the right moment, served Prussia. The headquarters of Blücher's so-called 'Silesian' army were also the headquarters of national literature; it was here that the demands for a severe punishment

of France and for the 'Rhine, Germany's river, not Germany's frontier' were most vigorously raised. At the time, however, the Prussian state did not avail itself of this quickly acquired opportunity. Austria now put its European interests far above its German ones, gave up the recovery of its former west German possessions and recouped its losses in Italy instead, behaving like a European power with only a limited stake in German affairs. Similarly, official Prussia acted like a state, not like part or leader of the German nation and quickly fell out with the 'Teutomanes' who had put their faith in it. The condition for the success, even the existence, of the 'German Confederation' was that Austria and Prussia should get on together as two European states; a silent agreement which both the Prussian and the Austrian governments recognized in 1815. The memory of what the Prussian state had briefly achieved never died completely and was revived in very different times and conditions; it was then coupled with the legend that in 1814 a great hope had been betrayed, and that the omissions of the past must now be made good.

5. *Interlude*

No new principle is ever immediately and completely victorious; the world must always tolerate various trends, various realities and dreams simultaneously. Who anyway would want to live in a period in which everything is organized in accordance with a single idea? The French Revolution meant the breakthrough of new liberal, democratic and nationalist aspirations that were henceforth always at work. The liberal demands freedom for the individual to live without state interference. This demand sounds splendid but it will always come up against boundaries which are sometimes more widely and sometimes more narrowly drawn. The democrat demands the equality of all and the rule of the majority, which he makes into something intrinsically just, almost sacred. Yet the majority is not a sure means for discovering the

true and the good. Democracy and liberalism moderate one another. The liberal principle combined with the democratic means the protection of minorities against the majority, and the protection of the individual against state interference; the democratic principle combined with the liberal means the protection of the majority against the powerful or successful individual who disregards the interests of the community. Similarly the two principles can destroy each other. Liberal catch-phrases readily hide the rule of numerically small but economically strong groups; government by the majority may well conceal the tyranny of a single will, a committee of public safety or dictator to whom the masses have entrusted themselves. Democratic military government in particular is anti-liberal, first because it forces everyone to do what only very few want to do, and secondly because it gives the whole state a military stamp and subjects popular education, the pursuit of knowledge and economic policy increasingly to military interests. The principle of the nation-state was meant as a just principle intended to strengthen not run counter to older, cosmopolitan hopes of peace. Nations would not do to each other what despots had done to each other; one nation's right of self-determination sanctioned that of another and established democratic peace between the two and everywhere. The experience of the age of revolution, however, was disappointing. The democratic military nation-state revealed itself as a state based on force at home and abroad. It used Machiavelli's principles as much or more than any absolute prince, with a clearer conscience and with greater effectiveness.

That was the lesson of the Napoleonic age, a first concentrated lesson that had to be learned and repeated many times in the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It had not exhausted the new ideas; these now existed and were and remained powerful. But they were unreliable, on paper because each of them carried to its logical conclusion cancelled itself out and led to absurdity, and in practice because ideas depend on men to realize them and because there is no relying on men. Men make of ideas what they want or consider appropriate under the pressure of circumstances.

Though the Congress of Vienna took place twenty-five years after the beginnings of the French Revolution its spirit was pre-revolutionary. It was a meeting of the old Europe after a new one had already made a noisy appearance. In Vienna there was talk not of popular sovereignty but of legitimate monarchies, however 'illegitimate' the conditions, for better or for worse, they had taken over. They spoke not of nations but of states, which all represented more or less the same thing. They spoke not of national interests but of European interests. The German Confederation was a main product of this spirit, its constitution a chapter of the Congressional Act which itself was meant to be something like a European constitution. As in the old days Germany was again part of Europe, greater than the others because it was involved with foreign destinies and because it was recognized as the heart of Europe. On the other hand it was less important than the others because it lacked the full force of a national state. Foreign rulers were members of the Confederation, the King of England as King of Hanover, the King of Denmark as Duke of Holstein and the King of the Netherlands as Duke of Luxembourg. Conversely some German rulers were not members in relation to all their possessions: East Prussia and Posen, though Prussian, were outside the Confederation and so too were Hungary and much of Italy, although they were ruled by the Habsburgs. In spite of formal isolation, however, the fate of Poland and Italy was closely connected with that of Germany. Poland remained partitioned between Russia, Prussia and Austria; Austria, which presided over the Federal Diet, was the chief power in southern Germany and in Italy. If separation from other nations is a condition of national existence, then the Germans had failed again to achieve such a separation and to realize themselves. The German Confederation was still European, intended to preserve European, as well as internal German, stability; it was not meant to do more.

One must never forget the real purpose of the German Confederation in so far as it is connected with European politics [wrote Wilhelm von Humboldt]. Its purpose is to ensure tranquillity. The whole existence of the Confederation is consequently designed to preserve the equilibrium

of the Continent through natural gravity; it would be quite contrary to this purpose to introduce a new collective state into the ranks of the European system in addition to the bigger individual German ones, not through a disturbance of that equilibrium but as the result of arbitrary action. No one could then prevent Germany, as Germany, from becoming another conquering state, a situation which no good German can want. While it is well known that the German nation has derived great advantages in intellectual and scientific education from having no foreign policy, it is not certain what effect such a policy might have . . .

That was the idea. Germany was too great, too varied to become a state like the others. As a unified power it would be too great for the rest and too strong for its own happiness. But it could be something better – Europe's trustee, unassailable and yet unfearful, united in defence, unsuited to expansion, diverse and content, devoted to science, education and development. This was a beautiful idea but also an artificial one, artistically expressed – an entirely static, conservative idea that could never inspire enthusiasm. If an age of tranquillity was approaching – and that was the intention of the peacemakers – the idea was a good one. However, if an age of dynamic simplification was approaching, the idea would be difficult to defend.

6. *Hegel*

The man who told the Germans most emphatically in what age they were living was the philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. He joined together in his mind the whole of current experience and ideas, everything that had ever been thought. This powerfully wrought fabric, the Hegelian 'system', later fell apart, but its individual tenets could never again be what they had been before Hegel; they remained shaped and coloured as he had left them. What Napoleon was to the political history of the period Hegel was to its intellectual history.

He was only one year younger than Napoleon but took longer

to become what he was. The intellectual usually takes more time to mature than the man of action; moreover Napoleon made the German philosopher's life difficult. While the Emperor ruled Europe Hegel earned his living as a provincial journalist and schoolmaster. Fame only came to him after the last bulletins from the front and after the last new state had been founded. His most influential period as professor of philosophy at Berlin was the fifteen years after Napoleon's fall. Therefore we might regard him as the philosopher of the Restoration rather than of the Napoleonic era; but eras follow each other without a break and clear divisions exist only in our minds. Hegel's philosophy was mature when Napoleon fell. What he did thereafter was merely to develop it, to apply it to different spheres of knowledge and to adapt new experiences to it as best he could. A man's fame and influence do not usually coincide with his essential achievement.

Born in Württemberg, educated at the seminary in Tübingen, Hegel started as a theologian, God-seeking and self-searching. He reflected with painful wonderment on the experience of solitude, separation and the fact that every being must be an entity by itself. But this gentle Swabian seeker after God also had an acute political sense of what a state is. He developed his philosophical ideas by studying German philosophy, Kant, Fichte and Schelling; his historical and political sense found ample food in the happenings of the times. From both sources, and from his vast learning, he created the Hegelian philosophy of history.

It was a fantastic, almost mad, almost successful attempt to give an answer to every question ever asked, and to assign to every answer ever given to every question a historical place within his own great, final answer – an attempt to create being dialectically from thought, to reconcile idea and reality and to overcome the cleavage between self and non-self. It was this cleavage – the existence of the self in an alien world – that Hegel made his starting-point. What he found was the identity of everything with everything, of God with the world, of logic with reality, of motion with rest, of necessity with freedom. The world spirit is everywhere, in nature, in man, in the history of man. The spirit, alienated from itself in nature, comes into its own in man. This

process takes place on the one hand in the true history of peoples and states, and on the other in art, religion and philosophy. All these spheres correspond to each other; what is accomplished in each individual sector belongs to the whole and fits into it or nothing will be accomplished. 'As far as the individual is concerned each person cannot in any event help being the child of his time. So too philosophy is the expression of its time in ideas.' 'He who expresses and accomplishes what his time wills is the great man of his time.' Every present is always a single whole, just as the history of mankind is in its general lines a whole. It finds expression in peoples, states and civilizations, of which the west European or, as Hegel calls it, the Germanic is the highest so far attained. Will there be higher ones? On this point the philosopher is silent. One can only understand the past, and the present to the extent that it is the final product of all pasts which are preserved in it. The future cannot be explored or understood; it does not exist for the spirit. No other historical thinker was so little concerned with the future as Hegel. What he hinted at, or what followed from his doctrine, was that the future would be something entirely different from the past. For philosophy comes late, at the end of an epoch. It does not come to change or improve, but merely to understand and to express; it constructs in the realm of the spirit what has already been constructed in the realm of reality. 'When philosophy paints its picture in grey on grey, it means that a form of life has grown old, and by painting it grey on grey it cannot be restored to its youth, but only recognized . . .' This applies to all true philosophy, and is most valid for the philosophy of all philosophies, namely the Hegelian, which brings to an end the epoch of all epochs; the age of Protestantism, enlightenment and revolution. What was still to come? Hegel shrugged his shoulders sadly at this question. Perhaps America, perhaps Russia, perhaps nothing at all. His philosophy gave no answer, and given its nature could not venture to attempt one. 'The spirit is in its full essence in the present . . .' But this philosophy of fulfilment, this song of praise of Man-God contains an element of pessimism: after 1815 nothing further is to be expected.

Though Hegel's philosophy as a whole constitutes rest, fulfilment and finality, it is full of unrest and struggle, both in the realm of the spirit and of reality. The spirit is never content with what has been achieved, it always seeks new conflicts, it must struggle to find and express itself anew. States and peoples are never at rest, they come into conflict and one of them must give way. The world spirit advances by catastrophes, and its path is marked by forms that are used up, emptied, and jettisoned. Quiet is only apparent quiet, lull before a new storm; as mere rest it is of no interest to the historian. 'Epochs of happiness are empty pages in the history of the world.' History does not exist for the happiness, the idyllic contentment of the individual. The goal is set high: the reconciliation of all contradictions, absolute justice, complete knowledge, the incarnation of reason on earth, the presence of God. The road to it is one of exertion and ever new confusion. But what has happened is the only thing that could have happened and how it happened was right. Terrible things occurred; the rise of the Roman Empire was terrible and terrible was its fall. But everything had a purpose and was as it should be. Julius Caesar was murdered after he had done what the age wanted from him; the Roman Empire collapsed after it had completed its historical mission. Otherwise how could it have fallen? It is useless to lament the abysses of history, the crimes of power, the sufferings of good men. The world spirit is right in the end, its will will be obeyed, its purpose fulfilled; what does it care about the happiness or unhappiness of individuals? 'The real is the rational and the rational is the real.' When something ceases to be rational, when the spirit has already moved on, it will wither away and die. The individual may not understand his fate because he is liable to over-estimate himself and believes that history revolves around his person at the centre. The philosopher who perceives the kernel in the multi-coloured rind of what occurs will provide the insight too.

Power, and war, which creates and enhances power, cannot be omitted from all this. Man only realizes himself in the state and the state exists only where there is power to defend and attack. Might gives right. It is unlikely, it is in fact impossible, that the

state without right on its side will win. What sort of right? Not a universally valid, pale right invented by stoicist philosophers, but historical right, the superiority of the historical mission. Thus right was on the side of the Spaniards against the Peruvians, in spite of all their cruelty and deceit; right was on Napoleon's side against the antiquated German Empire. Later, on the other hand, right was on the side of allied Europe against Napoleon only because, the professor concluded after much puzzling over this problem in his study, the arrogant Emperor, himself now out-dated, gave the Allies the right to conquer him, and only because he put himself in the wrong could he be conquered. Success, the outcome, provide the justification; in power there lies truth. When he began, Hegel wrote:

Men are so foolish that, blinded by their ideal vision of unselfish conceptions of freedom of conscience and of political liberty, and by the inward ardour of enthusiasm, they do not see the truth that lies in power . . . It is the philanthropists and moralists who decry politics as a human endeavour and an art, and who look on striving for one's own interest at the expense of what is right as a systematic work of injustice, while the ranting, non-party public, i.e. masses who have neither interest nor fatherland, whose idea of peace is the beer-hall, denounce politics for its fickleness and insufficient devotion to what is right . . .

But to Hegel the interests of the state alone are the force that decides what is right. That was what he thought at thirty, and he still thought so at sixty. In his late *Rechtsphilosophie* he still mocks at pacifists. 'And yet wars do occur whenever they lie in the nature of things; the crops grow again and idle talk ceases as soon as history recurs in real earnest.'

All this was developed with great force and originality, illustrated with a wealth of examples and produced in a language of creative force which German philosophy has never since attained. It was not narrow – it was as wide as the universe, a 'History of the World from a Cosmopolitan Point of View', in twenty volumes for which Kant had suggested the idea. Hegel's ideas were not anti-liberal; the state which he outlined in his philosophy of right was a constitutional though not a parliamen-

tary state. He was very serious, not cynical, and took a very earnest view of history, man and his task. His ideas were not intolerant or misanthropic. If Hegel sacrificed the individual, especially the great individual, to his 'world spirit' he nevertheless had a very clear sense of individual greatness and tragedy; if he looked upon the individual primarily as citizen and member of a community, he nevertheless wished to recognize his claim to a secure private sphere. He was contemptuous of the sentimental egoists, the unreliable romantics who merely toyed with God and the world and art, and of intellectual capriciousness and speculation, but only because he himself had experienced similar temptations. He had started with the loneliness of the individual in the tumult of life and though he ended by glorifying the state, his original feeling for the conflict between Self and World, Self and Other, lived on in his writings. His work is one of conflicts overcome and preserved. It is the richest, most subtle, most powerful philosophical edifice that has ever been erected.

It is also the most dangerous. The great professor presumed to tell us what the world is, to construct it from nothing or from 'pure being' in a system of equations that promised to omit nothing, neither the stars, nor the stones, nor science nor reality. He presumed to understand the origin, course and purpose of history. The philosopher knew what game was being played, the players themselves did not. Misused pawns, miserable puppets, they hung on strings held by the world spirit and moved according to its wish, but believed that they were following their own will. For Hegel everything fitted; he nodded grim confirmation over every piece of news that reached his desk. Once again the inevitable and the comprehensible had occurred.

Pretentious scholars and quack prophets have often nursed similar notions in Germany and outside. But they did freely what Hegel avoided doing: they applied their doctrine to the future, predicting its inevitable course. They were smaller men than he. In the beginning they were second-rate, inflated génies, in the end they were evil-minded littérateurs. But the vice they practised was brought into the world by Hegel. He it was who first discovered that all who had failed in life had deserved their fate, that

there was no need to feel sorry for them, and that only those who fulfilled the demands of the world spirit were destined to remain on top. He was the first to have the audacity to claim that he understood all that happened, approved of it, called it by universal names, and assimilated the reality to the idea. He defended power and Machiavellianism, the art of the ruthless use of power. He despised the moralists, the wiseacres who wrung their hands, the 'intellectuals' who told history what course to take instead of recognizing goodness and truth in reality itself. Even Kant had been one of these when he sadly remarked: 'It is not to be expected that right comes before might. It ought to do so but it does not.' Hegel rejected this dualism and doubt, again only after heavy spiritual conflict – in the highest sense. But how easy it became for others to ape this gesture which, without Hegel's living genius, became pure impudence. He spoke much of freedom, in the civil and in the philosophical sense, of the 'being-by-itself' of the spirit, of reconciliation of the ideal with the real, and he meant it all seriously. Yet he helped those who after him falsified the concept of freedom, as Rousseau had before him. Since the citizen finds his freedom only in the state, and the state must not lack the means of coercion, freedom is in the last resort found only in being coerced. According to Hegel, the criminal who is sentenced to death thus merely has freedom and human dignity bestowed on him. It was these casuistries of the Hegelian dialectic that were later used by German and non-German sophists to present the worse cause as the better and to proffer mad fantasies in the guise of political philosophy.

It was Hegel also who made the German world aware that 'history' is continuously in the making, that people live in history and that there are great decisions to be made. But this was not his doing only; his ideas were flood-gates through which the whole stream of the thought of his time forced its way. Even in the later eighteenth century men believed that they were living in unusual times; but they conceived of it as a single, unique step from a medieval irrationalism to a rationally ordered world. Now there were continuous crises, now every age had its own law which it struggled to fulfil, as did every nation, every *Volksgeist*. A great

boost was thus also given to the science of history, and to the view that every product of the human mind, state, law, custom and civilization can be understood in terms of its historical conditions. So-called Historicism has its good and its dangerous aspects. It separates the nations by recognizing their right to an existence of their own, as well as the absolute right to achieve that existence. Universally valid things make way for relative, historically conditioned things: 'world history is the world court of justice'.

Most of the innovations that our book deals with will have to be qualified by saying that they have their dangers. Man is his own friend and enemy. He uses his noblest and best intentioned ideas to produce means of destruction. So uncertain are all his creations that it only needs a little exaggeration, intensification and falsification to turn Rousseau's teaching into Robespierre's murderous practices, or to use Hegel's philosophy to create nationalist totalitarianism. Must we therefore say that it would have been better if this great thinker had not lived? If man did not live dangerously would he ever have achieved anything?

Part Three

Old Gods and New (1815-1848)

Napoleon described the old Continent as a tiresome molehill which did not satisfy his conception of grandeur. Yet Europe was pleasant and spacious in his time, and its German-speaking regions were extensive. The reader of Napoleon's letters or conversations is surprised by how modern they are. But an attempt to visualize what the countries which he ruled for a few years were then like, yields a picture more reminiscent of the Middle Ages than of our own day. Towns were still days and weeks apart. Those who had seen Europe, their country, or even a part of it and who were not confined to the vicinity of their town or village all their lives were still a tiny minority. For a moment, Napoleon had lit the flame of European unity, and its light continued to glow. But his means had been those with which the Romans had kept their empire together, the horse and the cart.

The main occupation of the German nation was what it had been a thousand years earlier – agriculture. Three-quarters of the population lived on the land and most townspeople got their livelihood from it. Towns were small and their way of life differed little from that of the country. Agricultural products were Germany's most important export, followed by craftsmen's products. There was no industry in the modern sense; manufacture was a matter of handicraft and home work. In town and country life was patriarchal. At table the farmer presided over the farmhands, the master over the journeymen; prayers were said at meals and only the senior farmhand or journeyman was allowed to speak without being addressed.

Class divisions were as uncomplicated as economic life. There were the 'nobility', the 'middle class' and the 'people'. Nobles

were landowners and held privileged positions in the army or the civil service. The middle class was composed of members of the academic and liberal professions, middle-rank civil servants, merchants, successful promoters of home industries and townsmen who had bought land. The rest was 'the people' - peasants, artisans and tradesmen, soldiers and journeymen, who began - but only in the forties - to be called 'proletarians'. At the top were the princes: those who still ruled and those who had been 'mediatized' and had ceased to rule at the beginning of the century, but who still had certain rights and enjoyed special status in their former territories. The Germans were a loyal people who clung to traditions; how loyal almost defines description. When the Elector of Hesse returned in 1814 after eight years of banishment he was enthusiastically welcomed, though almost everybody knew that he was a particularly bad prince who had once sold his subjects as soldiers to Britain and whose character had hardly changed subsequently. This fact did not diminish his subjects' enthusiasm. The wicked prince's carriage was pulled in joyful oblivion by citizens who included learned and liberal men such as the Grimm brothers.

Such a society, divided into thirty-six states, was easy to rule, provided it remained as it was. The history of the next thirty-three years is not primarily a history of the progress of ideas. Ideas are powerful provided they fit in with the changing climate. What gave the ideas new force, new meaning and different emphasis, and what finally led the 'people' to active participation in politics, was the slow, irresistible change in society. It has been said that it is impossible to fight ideas, but while they are only ideas they can be fought. Conservative statesmanship is powerless, however, against the hidden and automatic social process which, day by day, year by year, transforms small towns into cities and artisans into employers and employed. Today men attempt to plan and master the social process; there was no thought of that in the early nineteenth century when things were allowed to take their course. Thus it happened that a political order which in 1816 was reasonably suited to social realities lost more and more of its usefulness, until, in the middle of the century, there was profound unrest. A

steady drip, not a cloudburst, wears down the stone. From the stage-coach to the railway, the steamship and the telegraph, from the faith of an earlier generation to unconcealed atheism and materialism, from Goethe to Heine, from Hegel to Marx, from *Faust* to the *Communist Manifesto* – this is a story of tremendous social and intellectual upheaval.

1. Congress Europe

The coalition against Napoleon produced at first something like a European system, a lasting alliance of the Great Powers, Britain, Russia, Austria and Prussia, to which defeated France was allowed to adhere. The German Confederation was not as such a member of this pan-Europe, though it was represented by its two main powers; it was itself the creation of the first of the congresses by which the Great Powers sought after their fashion to ensure the peace of the Old World. It was a memorable attempt. Periodic meetings were held in suitably situated German, Austrian or Italian towns, not at regular intervals but when a sufficient number of problems had accumulated. The congresses settled disputes between the smaller states, saw that everything was as it should be in France, and even dared to touch upon such moral problems as the abolition of the slave trade. The idea was to nip in the bud the threat of new catastrophes, to serve peace and prosperity. For a short time all went well. Soon it became clear, however, that rulers, though they professed to have the welfare of mankind at heart, had their own interests which they hoped to satisfy under the cloak of the general good. Statesmen pretended to be concerned only with justice and major questions, but they could not avoid being themselves merely a part of the whole, and unjust; they confused their own interests, often only imaginary, with those of Europe as a whole.

The main power in Germany and Italy, the Habsburg multinational state of Austria, had nothing but peace and quiet in

mind. Outstanding among the men who spoke and acted for this state was the Foreign Minister, or Chancellor, Clemens von Metternich. He was a man of the old school, handsome, vain, cultivated and intelligent; happy and pleasure-loving as far as his own person was concerned, but pessimistic as a statesman and interested only in defending the *status quo*; a west European serving the great, diversified state that bordered on Russia and Turkey, a German from the Rhineland, aristocratically brought up, educated in the French manner and European in outlook. If anybody could claim to have the interests of the Continent at heart it was Metternich. The state which he served and on whose existence his own brilliant life depended was inextricably connected with Europe as a whole, for it was part of Germany, of Italy, of Poland and of south-eastern Europe. It was a structure that trembled dangerously as soon as anything moved on the Continent. Therefore Metternich was an enemy of any movement, any sudden, noticeable 'progress'. He disapproved of the 'new ideas', of the national state, of popular sovereignty, of constitutional monarchy. Should they triumph, the Austrian Empire would cease to exist. Britain, Russia, France and even Prussia might gain something by new movements, but not Austria, nor the social order that reigned in the Austrian Europe and under which he, Prince Clemens, prospered so well.

There are things to admire in Metternich. He foresaw the destructive chaos which nationalism would bestow upon the Europeans and had a clear feeling for joint European responsibilities. It was his doing that a sensible peace was made in 1814. Yet he expected nothing of the future and was frightened of it; he did not want to create anything new but merely to delay for a while what he himself regarded as inevitable. He had little faith in the judgement of his fellow men though much in his own, and described himself as 'doctor in the world hospital' – as though all historical activity, particularly all doctrinaire and idealist enterprise, was nothing but disease and folly. By nature tolerant and friendly, though callous, he became cruel for political reasons; he was not unduly worried by the knowledge that noble visionaries were lying in chains in Austrian prisons. He was opposed to any

form of dramatization: 'above all no pathos', he wrote under his own portrait. Yet because of his fear he created tragedy where none would have occurred if events had been allowed to take their natural course. After a long period during which he was hated by most historians and was anathema to all progressives it has now become customary to stress Metternich's achievements. On balance, making allowance for the fact that there is little that statesmen can really achieve, Metternich has more to his debit than to his credit.

The policy of the European congresses, to the extent that it was influenced by Metternich, was given a static, frightened, vindictive emphasis. This result was regrettable because it discredited the principle of joint European action and made the egoism of particular states appear comparatively progressive. While the Tsar would have liked to suppress Spanish liberalism and the South American independence movement he helped the Greek rebels against their Turkish rulers because he was planning to make himself the heir of Turkey and master of the Balkans and Constantinople. Austria was ready for joint action against revolution everywhere, but especially in Italy where its own frontiers were threatened. In Italy Austria took action, with or without Europe's mandate, and restored the absolute power of evil princelings. France did the same in Spain. Britain alone did not admit the principle of intervention. Though prepared to prevent the return of Napoleon and of revolutionary imperialism, Britain was unwilling to intervene in the internal affairs of foreign states, or to fight liberalism without asking for whose benefit action was being taken or whether there was anything worth saving. Britain opposed Prince Metternich on moral grounds but safeguarded British interests at the same time, because it had little to fear from liberal or national demands. It had no objections to the independence of South America, or to the independence of Greece provided that Greek independence was not a gift from Russia.

Because every power wanted something different and bent principles to suit its own interests, the congress system collapsed. At first it broke into two parts, with the two western powers on one side and the 'three eastern despotisms', Russia, Austria and

Prussia, on the other; then it broke into smaller parts which, like planets in a system without a central sun, circled around each other in confusion, formed brief attachments and broke away again, pulling away from and against each other while still being held together. The most steadfast country was Prussia, which remained loyal to Austria as well as to Russia, the reason being that Prussia was the smallest of the powers, without major European interests, still less overseas ones; moreover Prussia was deeply engaged in its own internal development.

2. Metternich's Germany

Germany was a piece of Congress Europe, with the difference that here the Metternich system lasted much longer. The Austro-British agreement ceased to exist at the beginning of the eighteenth-twenties, and Austro-Russian agreement collapsed over the conflict about Greek independence and was revived only occasionally. Up to the forties and beyond, Prussia and Austria found more to unite than to separate them. The framework of their joint existence was the German Confederation, which survived until 1866.

The Confederation was a miniature Congress Europe; led by the same power, Austria, ruled by the same spirit and, unfortunately, equally unproductive. What little action it took was negative, concerned with defence. Fruitless attacks were made on the 'new ideas'. Topical questions were not tackled on a federal basis, and the provisions of the Federal Act, under which constructive action affecting all Germany in the sphere of law, economic life and defence might have been accomplished, remained unused. This was all in line both with the spirit of the Metternich era and with the federal constitution, whose voting system seemed arranged to prevent decisions. To the present day no positive answer has been given to the question of what a federation of sovereign states can achieve. If its achievements are

great its members will soon cease to be sovereign, as in the case of the American states. The German states remained preoccupied with their sovereignty. The confederation which they formed was at best suited only to be a guardian – a preventive, not a creative force. This meant that it was historically unsuitable, because, above all, history is movement. What that movement cannot absorb, what falls apart when movement takes place, is not alive.

If people subsequently looked back with a certain nostalgia to the days of the German Confederation, it was because those were comparatively harmless, quiet times. For almost fifty years Germany was not involved in any serious wars – a rare blessing. The *Zeitgeist*, the spirit of the times, was not militant, and it alone produces the conflicts which, it is claimed, make war inevitable. It is futile to speculate how a federal army consisting of state contingents would have behaved in an emergency.

Politically the old Empire had fallen into three parts, Austria, Prussia and the Empire 'proper'; the same was inevitably true of the Confederation. In the Confederation 'proper' one has to distinguish between the three south German states (which since 1818–19 could boast of being constitutional) and central Germany, Saxony, Hanover and the small north German states. There were profound differences within each group: between Hamburg which was advanced and anxious for contact with England and medieval arch-conservative Mecklenburg, between Baden, which was politically alive and looked across the Rhine towards France, and Bavaria, ostensibly a constitutional state and a patron of the arts, but uninterested in power politics. Germany was still without a centre and still presented a picture of colour and variety.

It is impossible to say when exactly 'Austria' ceased to be regarded simply as 'German'. Humboldt's wife wrote as early as 1815:

Austria is so varied and its component parts, its nationalities, are so heterogeneous that I would wager anything that it will cease to be a German power in this century. German national feeling appears to be growing and Austria is not keeping in step. There is apparently no force strong enough to halt the spirit of the times . . .

Thirty years later Austria's noblest poet, Franz Grillparzer, made a sharp distinction between Germany and Austria. He declared proudly that he had never published anything abroad and had never written for German journals, thereby contrasting his country as an entity with the rest of Germany. Not all were as Habsburg-minded or as unreceptive to the claims of a national state as Grillparzer, not all succeeded in cutting themselves off from Germany so easily and naturally. Metternich himself regarded the Habsburg monarchy as a predominantly German political system, without attaching much importance to the fact; the capital was German, the dynasty was German and the language of the army and the senior civil service was German. At the same time Metternich encouraged the efforts of the Czechs and Croats to cultivate their languages; he wanted the old provinces of the Empire to have a life of their own so as to preserve its equilibrium. Hungary went its own way, an empire in itself, the property of a native aristocracy, unconcerned with German and European affairs.

The Danubian Empire was separated from the 'rest of Germany' by the barriers of tariff walls and a strict censorship of books and periodicals. In Austria there was no political literature apart from that initiated by the government and ably produced by educated foreigners. There was no stimulating intellectual life; indeed one might say there was no public life at all. The police were omnipotent and omniscient, the universities were conceived as schools for training civil servants, and the Catholic Church was controlled by the state. No constitutional restrictions affected the power of the monarchy. Austria behaved, or tried to behave, as though the French Revolution had never been. At the top of the pyramid there was the Emperor, Francis I, a hard-working, honourable man as he saw himself, not without patient political shrewdness, but cold and heartless, a man who unhesitatingly identified the welfare of his subjects with the splendour of his dynasty, and who was untouched by any trace of 'modern ideas'. 'I don't need scholars but obedient subjects,' he said to the professors of Graz University. 'Those who disagree with me can find themselves another master.' There were the Emperor's numerous

relatives with their sinecures, vice-kingdoms and Italian thrones; then came the nobility, international or inter-Austrian, German, Czech, Hungarian, Italian, Belgian and Spanish, but always and above everything Austrian, rich, pleasure-loving and urbane; next followed the senior civil servants, the clergy, the provincial notables, and then the 'people'. Music flourished, and a little later – but this was already a sign of nascent unrest – comedy as well. Austria was a beautiful country and though the government was in constant financial difficulty, not a poor one. Yet there was no active community life, no state in the sense which the word had acquired in the previous fifty years. Austria took little part in the intellectual life of western Europe. The writer Börne, from Frankfurt, called it 'Europe's China', an allusion to its isolation, its immobility and lack of history. Could that state of affairs continue, was it possible in the nineteenth century to govern European peoples in this way and for this kind of Austria to rule the German Confederation? A Frenchman wrote in the thirties: 'The nineteenth century will spell death for the Austrian monarchy.'

It is also impossible to say exactly when a few prescient men first began to hope or fear that Prussia might one day unify Germany. In the eighteenth century this would have been a laughable idea; Prussia was the mischief-maker, the destroyer of imperial unity. During the later years of the Revolution Prussia went its own selfish way while Austria fought on, for itself and the Empire, and showed remarkable staying power in spite of all defeats. It was during the years of reform that Prussia first showed signs of a national and humane spirit transcending its narrow interests. As yet Stein did not think of Prussians as more 'German' than Austrians; he still hoped that the two would share the leadership of their common country. It was the men at Prussian headquarters during the War of Liberation who were the first to regard themselves as more nationalistic, better and more forward-looking than the Austrians. At the Congress of Vienna experienced diplomats, like Talleyrand and even Gentz, uttered warning words about Prussia: it was about to make an alliance with the nationalists, it aspired to conquer the whole of Germany. The new territorial divisions made no provision for thwarting this ambition;

they took Prussia far to the west and the south, and gave it the Rhine, the river of which it now began to make a curious heathen cult. Then there was quiet; the reformers disappeared, the old Prussian nobility came to the fore again and there was a close understanding between Metternich and the King of Prussia. Yet even during these years of peace Prussia's tariff policy was consciously directed towards the economic domination of Germany. Thinking people in the twenties realized that Prussia's problems were soluble whereas Austria's were not, that it was the better ruled, more modern, more active state, a miniature Germany, whereas Austria was only a miniature Europe – and from that almost everything followed. After 1830 the prophecies became more numerous: Prussia would expel Austria from the German Confederation and unite the nation, either peacefully or by force. That was not the conscious aim of the Prussian leaders. Nor on the other hand can it be said that the subsequent events and actions were surprising, unnatural improvisations. The opportunities became gradually more numerous. There was much speculation, some of it correct, about the shapes which gradually began to appear on the distant horizon.

Whereas in Austria the problems of the modern state were officially unknown, in Prussia they were not disputed. A strong wind blew in Prussia and there were restless spirits there, particularly in the newly acquired western provinces. Repeatedly – five times, as people calculated bitterly – the monarch had promised to give representatives of the people some share in the government. The promise was neither kept nor withdrawn and this imprecision created a provisional atmosphere. There was corporative representation in the provinces, but it was weak and predominantly aristocratic, suited to keeping political demands alive, not to implementing them. As a source and centre of intellectual stimulus Berlin University towered above that of Vienna, and though the great professor of philosophy, Hegel, now defended the state as it was and taught obedience, his complex philosophy was inherently one of movement and unrest. Universities also existed in Königsberg, Breslau and later Bonn; there were aggressive academic teachers like Ernst Moritz Arndt

and influential journalists like Joseph Görres. King Frederick William III, a north German variant of the Habsburgs, was a wholehearted supporter of Metternich and of his son-in-law, the arch-reactionary, the despot of all despots, Grand Duke, later Tsar, Nicholas of Russia. Yet it was more difficult in Prussia to behave as though the French Revolution had never happened than in Austria. Consequently oppression took a more violent form, as well as being more futile.

In the German Confederation the two Great Powers made common cause – an inevitable condition for its success, for its very existence. Negation united them, the fight against the liberalism of south German constitutional life, new, artificial and harmless though it was. With greater determination they fought the universal ‘spirit of unrest’, the ‘passion for change’, the ‘demagogues’. That is the real political theme of the years around 1820. It must be said that it was unproductive, that period in which statesmen chose to make the persecution of romantic students, of courageous if not very bright youths, their chief preoccupation.

What Metternich and his allies offered the Germans was peace and order, customary, ordinary, unhistorical things. A long period of stirring history was now to be followed by uneventful times in which the individual’s sole concern with the law was to obey it. He was to concentrate on the economic struggle for existence; the rest would be done discreetly by a congress of diplomats in Frankfurt, by rulers and ministers, councillors and chiefs of police. The prospect did not please the young men back from the war. Thrilled by their common experience and by the songs of the poets of freedom – some of them excellent – they expected other things. They did not know themselves exactly what; it is characteristic of such youth movements that they generate noisily assertive energies and create a community feeling without having a rational programme. ‘We are here, we are better than the old ones, we want to stay together’ – that is what it amounts to. On the other hand it is characteristic of political activity that in the long run it can never satisfy such large, vague hopes and demands. Metternich knew this and took pleasure in his wisdom. The old men who were in power had experienced the

French Revolution, and their one aim was to prevent its repetition. The young men had experienced only the War of Liberation and had enjoyed it.

The *Burschenschaften*, the student associations which spread from Jena to northern and central Germany, were Christian and national, in favour of a united, great German fatherland, against foreign, particularly French, influences, and against the Jews, who had recently become conspicuous in literary life and whose civil status was in question. The students were not 'liberal' in the sense which the word acquired a little later, in the eighteenth-twenties. They were not interested in constitutions of the south German type; on the contrary, they felt that such popular representation was an artificial product, imported from Britain and France, a feeling that was not entirely unjustified. On the other hand they were not in favour of absolute monarchy; among the books ceremonially burned at the great student rally at the Wartburg in 1817 were works of absolutist political philosophers, as well as the liberal *Code Napoléon*. This twofold hostility indicates how difficult it was to bring the political views of the *Burschenschaften* into line with the ideas and conflicts of the times. Their ideal lay in the past; they thought that their choice of dress, their beards and long hair were Teutonic and they believed their black, red and gold colours to be the colours of the old Empire. They hated the French who had wanted to force themselves on the world as the nation of progress; they hated Germany's pre-revolutionary past of rococo, pigtailed and fancy uniforms, not for being the past as such but for symbolizing a perverted, Frenchified period. From Jahn they took the enthusiasm for physical fitness as well as a strong feeling for equality, a protest against inherited class distinctions. Jahn and his followers in the *Burschenschaften* carried their Franco-phobia to absurd, repulsive extremes: 'If you let your daughter learn French you might just as well teach her to become a whore.' Other *Altburschen*, Arndt, Luden and Fries, taught the students more worthwhile things, a feeling for the seriousness of life, a sense of what is fitting, faith in God and faith in man; indeed the whole movement must have been an indissoluble mixture of the noble and the

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absurd, of sane and distorted ideas. This first German youth movement was unique, and more confused than anything that had appeared in European politics since Rousseau. Above all it could not be identified with French or English, or even southern European, political concepts, and did not want to be. Görres, close to this movement though towering above it, sought to make its activities comprehensible to the French public in the following words:

In Germany it was not the Third Estate that made the revolution but governments under the protection of a foreign power (Napoleon's) . . . With us it is the supporters of despotism who use Jacobin forms and practices, whereas some of the friends of freedom defend the principles of the French reactionaries. That is the confusion which presents the foreign observer with a puzzling problem . . .

The clear-cut concepts of French politics – reactionary, conservative, progressive, revolutionary, left, right – were useless for the understanding of German problems.

These boys were really harmless, if devoid of taste; they might have been left in peace. What happened was that one of them, a morbid youth, took too seriously the dagger which they all carried in their belts. He assassinated a minor dramatist named Kotzebue who earned some pocket-money by sending reports to the Tsar. It was a fortunate period in which such a stupid crime could make 'history' and stir passionate feelings among the populace. The murderer, Karl Ludwig Sand, who was beheaded, became a martyr of the national cause, a misguided saint. Prince Metternich made the murder into as great a threat as the storming of the Bastille, calling for extreme measures if Germany was to be saved from chaos. His generation of rulers was always scenting danger and was forever on the defensive. It thought that the French Revolution could have been prevented if only the King had struck in time, and it wanted to do better.

There now began an unpleasant period of political persecution. Its guiding principles were called the 'Karlsbad Decrees', because it was in Karlsbad that Metternich in confidential ministerial discussions pushed through the programme which was later enacted

law by the Federal Diet. A commission was set up to investigate subversive activities; individual states could use its reports as they thought fit. The *Burschenschaften* were dissolved, the universities were placed under political supervision and advance censorship of all printed material of less than twenty pages was introduced. Again one is tempted to say what harmless, happy times in which such actions could be regarded as terrible despotism. Yet every age must be judged by its own yardstick. In the early nineteenth century men everywhere in Europe and America strove for civil liberties, which included the free discussion of political questions. To attempt to stifle this desire was to sin against the spirit of the age. So much the worse if the attempt was successful; it then involved what in legal language is called a 'crime against unborn life'. Prince Metternich succeeded only in part. He was too civilized, at bottom too 'liberal', to insist that the decrees be strictly applied. Moreover, he had nothing positive to offer, no faith to press on people; what he offered and demanded was moderation. But it is hard to fight for moderation with immoderate means. The acquisition of what is now called 'totalitarian' power requires fanatical determination and faith, which Metternich and his friends lacked. The fact that Germany was so divided also helped the cause of freedom. Some German states, particularly the southern ones, regarded the decrees of Karlsbad and Vienna as conflicting with their sovereignty and did not carry them out. Nevertheless there was persecution and innocent people were ruined. Intellectuals were restricted in their activities, intimidated and driven out of the country.

The fact that the German Confederation accomplished nothing except the Karlsbad Decrees amounted, even at this early stage, to bankruptcy. On paper it appeared insignificant; in reality its only achievement was a narrow, philistine negation.

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3. An Example: Joseph Görres

We have already met Görres as a young, high-spirited intellectual adventurer at the time of the French Revolution, and as a mature but angry man during the dramatic months of Napoleon's fall. Now we meet him again. Without reaching a very advanced age he lived through the whole of the period covered by this chapter. One generation sees many historic figures and tries to understand them as best it can. Let us take Görres as an example of how a powerful lively mind sought its way through the labyrinth of the times.

He belonged to those who were deeply disappointed by the outcome of the last Napoleonic crisis. He had hoped for a German empire, strong abroad and free within. Instead there was Metternich's aristocratic caution, supported after brief hesitation by Prussia. The men who had dreamt of a strong Prussian leadership of Germany were compelled to retire into private life, first Stein, then Humboldt and then Görres, whose *Rheinischer Merkur* was banned after he had dared to attack reaction in Prussia.

Görres was now a Prussian subject; his home, the Rhineland, had been amalgamated with Prussia at the Congress of Vienna. The reshaping of the province, its unification with old Prussia, whose character was so different, did not take place without serious troubles in which Görres constituted himself the defender of his Rhenish countrymen. His thesis was that the Rhine province had not been conquered but had become part of Prussia by treaty, and that the King was therefore obliged to concede to its citizens their rights in matters of popular representation, economic interests, and religious freedom and equality. He took up the cause of disappointed hopes, of suppressed unrest. His pamphlet *Deutschland und die Revolution* appeared in 1819, after the assassination of Kotzebue and after the Karlsbad Decrees.

In it Görres said that in 1815, at the Congress of Vienna, historically false decisions had been made. Germany had been cheated out of a new form. The German Confederation was worthless, it was merely the 'Holy Alliance' on German soil; Europe

was playing a game of make-believe; in fact the Confederation had no genuine life of its own.

The current theory is that in noble universality the German must belong to all nations; Swiss, Jewish pedlar, lackey and ruffian of the whole world all in one, he must never, at the risk of severe punishment, think of his country, which they have torn to shreds. He is allowed to ape all foreign follies, but when the young generation tried to bring back old German customs it was accused of Teutomania.

The freedom just tolerated in southern Germany was not 'that German variety which added the much hated unity to real freedom', it was only 'French liberality come to terms with Napoleon'. The rulers of Bavaria, Württemberg and Baden hated the memory of the old Empire; their states were cold mechanisms which eradicated everything traditional, everything that had developed naturally.

Their constitutions are not social associations set up by independent men to involve and to liberate each other; they are books whose leaves had once grown green, then were torn to shreds, pulverized and made into paper on which their vulgar thoughts were written, numbered, bound and given a gilt edging; when out of print they are reissued in a new edition. Thus their activity is not blessed because it is based only on vanity . . .

Austria thought that it could lead a quiet life and keep completely apart from Germany's intellectual movement 'but nobody can break off an historical association as easily as that and just pocket the profits'. Because of its glorious achievements, Prussia might have played its part in reshaping the nation in the eighteenth century and again in 1813. But the men in Berlin pursued a selfish, purely Prussian policy, and, like Austria, saw ghosts everywhere and were terrified of revolution. Their clumsy, wicked oppression merely strengthened what they were hoping to destroy.

After four years of bitter party struggle, of senseless resistance against the demands of the times, of partial concessions by one side and exaggeration by the other, the situation has reached the point where the whole of Germany is in a state of spiritual ferment and its mood is such as usually precedes great historical catastrophes. The busiest intrigues

and the cleverest demagogic efforts from below could never alone have succeeded in arousing and embittering the quiet, peace-loving, sober and moderate German people to its very depths; that has been successfully accomplished by those at the top who control the long arm of the lever . . .

And further:

Not for this have such terrible storms swept across Europe, that while they still rumble on the distant horizon the empire of mediocrity which they destroyed should rise again – the empire in which all force is discord, all talent dangerous power, in which all thought is regarded with distrust and all enthusiasm is treated as dangerous folly. Henceforth history has no use for vapid, threadbare courtiers who study triviality and make futility their business . . .

Görres described the student movement as a natural reaction against everything false and as an attempt to achieve, in the academic sphere at least, what had failed miserably in the political. He was even prepared to understand Sand's action and to approve of the motives, if not of the deed. For the Karlsbad Decrees he showed even more contempt than hatred: 'The noise of boxes being broken open', 'the comings and goings of policemen', 'hasty abrogation of all legal forms', 'interrogation, arrest and release'. By such means, he prophesied, the course of history could not be stayed. Revolution could and should be prevented, for revolutions were terrible. A German revolution would be at least as fruitful and violent as the French. It would

inevitably end with the expulsion of all ruling dynasties, the destruction of all ecclesiastical forms, the extermination of the aristocracy and the introduction of a republican constitution; then, when it has found its more fortunate Wallenstein, it will step beyond its frontiers and destroy Europe's whole rotten political system as far as the frontiers of Asia, because every revolutionized nation necessarily becomes a conquering one . . .

That must not happen, neither must there be foolish resistance to the Will of the Age. Reform there must be, a return to the position of four years earlier when the wrong road was taken in Vienna. Its aim would not be to put into practice any one theory, like that

of Rousseau; that was not what the Germans, or men in general were likely to do. '... theory cuts like the blade of the sword and spreads like the flame of the fire; but human beings are a mixture of contrasts, modified by gradual change, and all extremes are poison to their nature.' Görres did not want a Jacobin state based on a single plan. Germany needed monarchy and aristocracy, just as it needed a strong, free middle class, corporate representation of the whole nation, and freedom of thought and expression. It needed moderation, not revolutionary excess, reconciliation not conflict. However, it takes two to produce reconciliation. After Görres had made his powerful plea the King of Prussia ordered his arrest and he was forced to flee. Since he was not safe in any German state he went to France, to Alsace.

In Görres' thought there is much that is characteristic of the period and also much that is characteristically German. He was liberal but not in the sense of the liberalism practised in France under the restored monarchy, which he regarded as a corrupt comedy. He wanted to see Germany reformed, but on the basis of old traditions – with a peasantry, an army, a teaching profession, and a parliament representing the middle class, the aristocracy and the church. But were such estates still in existence, after hundreds of years of absolutism, in the century of the middle classes, and if they still existed, would they be the future leaders of society? Was Görres, with his firm belief in the flow of history, not demanding a reversal of this flow? It is characteristic of him that he wanted 'progress' and an admixture of democracy, but certainly not something modelled on what was gradually developing in France; he wanted a Germanic democracy, a national community. This would have needed great public spirit, not only in the individual publicist but also in the mass of the people who made up 'Germany'. The political philosopher can hardly count on such lasting enthusiasm or such control of all selfish interest – Görres demanded that the aristocracy should voluntarily and happily pay as much in taxes as it possibly could.

In Strasbourg, where he spent several years of exile, Görres returned to the faith of his childhood. He who as a young man had made fun of the 'profitable foolery' of the 'black magicians'

became the champion of the Catholic Church. Homeless, he longed for firm support both in this world and in the next. The return was made easier for him by a democratic Catholic movement initiated in France, though not welcomed in Rome. The new Catholic character of his activities finally took him back to Germany. In 1827 he was given an appointment at the University of Munich. Prussia protested against the appointment of this 'demagogue' and demanded his extradition, but Bavaria refused to listen. Görres thus learned to appreciate the advantages of German particularism. It was possible to be wanted by the police in Berlin and to be a highly respected man, a professor and even ennobled, in Munich.

In his old age Görres worked for many years on a vast four-volume work entitled *Die christliche Mystik* (Christian Mysticism). It was full of both profound and strange things, so strange that the church itself regarded him with suspicion. Görres was fighting against what seemed to him the strongest trend of the period 'impertinent beggar's pride', 'the dreariest, shallowest ignorance'. What the natural sciences could comprehend gave no meaning to life and had no right to claim universality. There was another, higher type of knowledge, which was as susceptible of proof as physical knowledge. 'If you deny what the best and most credible people in all ages have repeatedly found I shall deny the whole of world history . . .' He was referring to apparitions of the devil and of ghosts, to the good and the evil eye and the proven effect of holy water. The rationalist and worshipper of revolutions of 1793, the enthusiastic German romantic of 1806, became a mystic in his old age; not only a mystic but the teacher of a mixture of science and hair-raising speculation that can only be called superstitious. He had gone from one extreme to the other, and yet always remained the same, an honest fighter for justice and a seeker after truth.

4. Periods and Events

Thirty-three years is a long period both in the life of a nation and of an individual; they bring change. It has been said that these thirty-three years, 1815–48, were an uneventful period, which is true if one means that there were no wars, revolutions or major conflicts. Before 1815, and again after 1848, the papers were able to offer more exciting news. Yet Europe and its German-speaking part changed in those years, just as they did before and since. The changes were of the kind against which governments are powerless unless they seal off their country from world history, as Japan did for two hundred years. Prince Metternich tried to do this in Austria, though not seriously. He encouraged the building of roads and railways and during his rule Vienna became a great industrial city. How in the long run could the 'defence of the *status quo*' be successfully maintained against such developments? Metternich and his friends were sufficiently clear-sighted to recognize that their policy was essentially one of rearguard action. 'Time storms ahead,' wrote the Chancellor; 'to halt its violent advance by force would be a vain undertaking . . . To soften the disastrous effects is all that remains for the protectors and friends of peace to do . . .' There was economic progress; factories, banks and insurance companies were founded. The nation grew. In the three decades after Napoleon's fall the population of Germany, excluding Austria, rose from twenty-four to thirty-six million. There were developments in fashion and modes of life which became increasingly middle class – if an absence of colour, monotony of dress, lounge-suits and boots, spectacles and cigars are middle class. There was advance in the intellectual sphere, and the German language became more flexible.

If we say that there was 'advance' we do not necessarily mean that things improved. The word 'advance' has a positive, happy connotation which probably originates from war, where advance is better than retreat. Because time moves only in one direction – we think of it as 'advancing' – we are tempted to regard the changes that time brings as 'progress'. Faith in progress was

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never stronger than in the nineteenth century. It originated in the seventeenth and eighteenth century and was connected with the progress of science which was clearly developing at a tremendous rate. Faith in progress was also connected with political history, where there was an advance in the direction of freedom and self-government. Furthermore, we tend to equate progress with desired increase, and in the period under consideration energy increased with ever-growing rapidity: production rose, traffic became faster and the population multiplied. To that extent there was undoubted 'advance'. As regards the progress of human happiness every change brings losses and gains. In that sense there can be no straightforward advance, but in 1840 this proposition was not as axiomatic as it is today.

The fundamental changes are the slow and undramatic ones, which happen every day and finally add up to something big. Sudden revolutions, if they are of use at all, can only release forces that have accumulated day by day for years. More or less the same is true of the so-called change of generation, which does not really occur in public life, although the death of some outstanding personality or other might create such an impression. At the beginning of the eighteen-thirties two Germans died who had been dominant in their spheres for many years, Goethe and Hegel. At the time it was felt that with them an era had ended and that another, less important as well as more active, was beginning. The deaths of two individuals, however, cannot make, though they may symbolize, a turning point. The men who next came to the fore in German literature had already been there and had long regarded the 'poet prince' as old-fashioned.

It can never be determined to what extent the revolution of 1848 was caused by social change and to what extent it was spontaneous, an affair of the 'intellectuals' stimulated by foreign countries, by France, by anticipation and false comparisons. Certainly foreign influence was strong. The old leaders were men of the Napoleonic era whose ideas were those of the Germany of 1818. The young generation thought differently and was different. German society, too, was different and more modern, and since systems of government had remained almost unchanged, they

were obviously more antiquated in 1848 than in 1815. Even in 1848, however, industrialization was still in its infancy; towns on average had only just kept in step with the increase of the population as a whole, and those who, like Karl Marx, simply transferred to Germany ideas derived from the French experience were mistaken.

In July 1830 workers and students in Paris rose against the Bourbon King, Charles X, who was about to overthrow the constitution. Fighting on the barricades was followed by the flight of that incorrigible old gentleman. Clever citizens for whom the revolt seemed to be going too far raised Louis Philippe of Orleans, a relative of the royal house, to the throne. These events made a deep impression in Europe. The expulsion of the Bourbons was the end of the 'restoration', a blow against the work of the Congress of Vienna. If the rulers of Europe allowed it to happen, a precedent would be created, of which the consequences could not be foreseen. They did allow it to happen; after fifteen years they could not make war to put the Bourbons back on their throne. Britain had no such intention, and neither had Austria or Prussia; perhaps the Tsar had, but he was soon involved elsewhere. The conflagration spread from one centre to another. In August there was a revolution in Brussels and the Belgians rose against the alien bureaucracy of the King of the Netherlands; in November the Poles rose against Russian rule, in February the Romans against their old-fashioned sovereign, the Pope. In Britain in the course of 1831 there was growing, often violent, agitation for parliamentary reform. The old order seemed to be collapsing everywhere. However, it was not international liberalism that was destined to be victorious in Europe but other forces more difficult to describe. In Belgium some clever political manoeuvring prevented a catastrophe; the Great Powers decided to create an independent, permanently neutral kingdom of the Belgians. The new state soon became a model of central and local self-administration. Here the constitution made the king, not a gracious king the constitution. The Poles were left to their fate, the guns and gallows of Tsar Nicholas; Prussia actively helped the Tsar by mobilizing on its eastern frontiers to prevent the rising

from spreading to its Polish province of Posen (Poznan) and to drive Polish refugees back into the Russian fire. In Rome there was the Austrian army and good advice to the Pope to experiment with a few modern ideas. In 1833 Europe was back to 'normal'. Soon the legality of the new French government was doubted only by a few pedants.

Germany too was part of the world in which this sequence of events took place. In several states of the Confederation, in Hesse, Hanover and Saxony, popular pressure led to the enactment of a basic law in the modern sense. There was much enthusiasm for the liberation struggle of the Poles, and also for the reappearance in Paris of the old heroes of the legendary revolutionary past – while it was not yet clear that the citizen-King, Louis Philippe, intended to steer a very sober, not to say ignoble, course. In contrast to the celebrations of the *Burschenschaften* twelve or fourteen years before, the tenor was now more radical, more international, more in keeping with European liberalism as a whole. Once more, as around 1790, France became the model. The speeches that were made at a political meeting in Hambach in the Palatinate in 1832 might just as well have been made by French or Italian popular leaders.

As soon as German popular sovereignty is given its legitimate place there will be the closest federation of peoples, because the people love where kings hate, the people defend where kings persecute, the people do not grudge brother nations what is most precious to themselves and which they seek to acquire with their life-blood – freedom, enlightenment, nationhood and popular sovereignty. The German people therefore does not grudge its brothers in Poland, Hungary, Italy and Spain these great, invaluable benefits . . . Three cheers for the united free states of Germany! Three cheers for federated, republican Europe!

Theirs was the easy optimism of men concerned only with ideas, without any experience themselves, who never thought about the great experience of the French Revolution. People are good, let them be in charge and chase away the princes; the rest would follow. For example, as someone suggested at Hambach, the French might give the Germans Alsace and Lorraine and recompense themselves with the French-speaking part of the Nether-

lands. Only a small minority thought and spoke like this and penetrated beyond the demands of constitutionalism to the idea of a democratic republic. The road to it seemed smooth because the case was logical and appeared to be dictated by common sense. The obstacles in the path, however, were anything but logical. They had been created by History, and History cares little about common sense.

The Radicals were taken seriously enough to be feared, and there was a new wave of persecution in Prussia, Hesse and even in easy-going Bavaria, more vicious than that of 1819. Hundreds of people were sentenced to death, and although they were reprieved from execution their spirits were broken in prisons and fortresses. German refugees met in foreign capitals, in London, Paris, Brussels and Zürich. Some, not the worst, turned their backs for ever on their homes and emigrated to America. The contrast between the existing political system and the intellectual resources of the country was great. Those who thought about these things at all – always a mere minority – did not doubt that there would have to be a change, that a monarchical, bureaucratic military system was no longer in keeping with the spirit of the age. But who would bring about a change, how and when and what form it would take, nobody really knew.

It was in other spheres and by other people that creative action was taken. In 1818 the Prussian state became a unified customs area. The policy of the Prussian Ministers was to present the German Confederation with *faits accomplis*, to force the small states surrounded by Prussia to join the Prussian economic system by imposing high transit duties, and to promote agriculture by low import duties. One by one they joined the *Zollverein*, beginning with various small north German states, then Hesse, then Bavaria and Württemberg, and finally Baden and Saxony. Internal German customs barriers disappeared and the governments of the *Mittelstaaten* left the direction of their trade policy largely to the Prussian rulers, although they were formally entitled to be consulted. Only a few north German states, orientated towards the sea or towards Britain, like Hanover and Hamburg, kept apart. The aims of the *Zollverein* were economic; they

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corresponded to the facts of the situation and were propagated by such an un-Prussian, imaginative, progressive and freedom-loving writer as the Württemberg economist, Friedrich List. How could Germany's economic life catch up with that of Britain, France and America as long as Anhalt-Köthen and Anhalt-Dessau were separated by frontier posts?

Political consideration also played a part. The importance of the customs union between Prussia and southern Germany, wrote the Prussian Minister of Finance, lay in the fact that 'unification of these states in a customs and trading union leads to the establishment of a unified political system.' Metternich fully appreciated this fact, realized the significance of Austria's exclusion from the unified Prussian-led economic area and tried to prevent it; his diplomacy was no more able to stop the flow of goods than his police were able to stop the flow of ideas.

Economics are not identical with politics and we must be wary of saying that from that moment, 1 January 1834, the course of German history was prescribed. In every crisis, however, the fact of economic unity and dependence was henceforth a powerful, secret influence. Nothing irremediable had been created but the new union weighted the scales heavily on one side. The southern German liberals, incidentally, were opposed to the customs union, which they saw as a conquest of the South by reactionary Prussia – which in a certain sense it was. Yet might economic unity and progress not in the end operate against the very powers that the liberals were afraid of? History prepares many surprises, often disagreeable ones, for the victor.

The framework created by the *Zollverein* was filled in by the railways. Again it was Friedrich List who was their great advocate, and the construction of the first big line, from Leipzig to Dresden, was due to his persistent initiative. Other lines followed, from Munich to Augsburg, Frankfurt to Mainz, Berlin to Anhalt. In 1845 Germany had about 1,250 miles of track; only ten years later there were almost 5,000 miles and the construction of the major lines was in full swing. Is this not the secret, the essence of the history of this and subsequent decades? Is it not this which changed Germany more profoundly and more irresistibly than all

revolutions, wars and political intrigues taken together? The railways produced, consumed and reproduced capital which was invested in more railways, they encouraged the establishment of banks and stock exchanges and gave a decisive stimulus to the mining and machine industries. They created the new types of men who built and operated them, industrialists, workmen, engineers and office-workers. They displaced people and speeded up news services before the days of the electric telegraph, and raised the volume of passenger and goods traffic – literally a thousandfold. They revolutionized the art of war, changed the face of towns and the rhythm of rural life, and brought lonely villages within the reach of the towns. They created wealth, they created poverty and transformed the poor into what were now called ‘proletarians’. They reduced the size of a country that had once been spacious and beautiful.

Of all this only the very first beginnings were felt in 1840. In Germany it was mainly private capital that built the railways and drew from them annual dividends of fifteen per cent and more; in Austria it was the state. Once the railways were there, however, Austria could not remain Metternich’s Austria. Heine revealed this secret in a poem, the fable of the horse and the donkey. The two animals watch a noisy steam train push past, billowing black smoke. The horse is dismayed, his day is over, man will no longer need him or feed him, and will send him to the devil. The donkey remains cheerful; he, the homely, unassuming, useful beast of burden, has nothing to fear from the new age, man will always want him. The moral: the age of chivalry is over, the proud horse must go hungry, but the wretched donkey will always have his hay and oats.

The age of chivalry was over – the refusal of the ‘knights’, the rulers of Germany, to recognize this fact lay at the root of the political struggles of the next decades. However, things happen very, very slowly in real life. The *Zollverein* no more created instantaneous political unity in Germany – though it laid the foundations for it – than the new industry which grew up round the railways produced the instantaneous change in the class structure which some theorists had expected. Meanwhile in

Barmen, his native town, the schoolboy Friedrich Engels passed daily by factories where in low, uninspected rooms, workers – among them six-year-old children – ‘breathe in more coal smoke and dust than oxygen’. To him and others came the idea that was bound to come to people at such a time: that the essence of all history is economic history; that political struggles are merely the expression of what takes place in the economic sphere; that politicians are only puppets on strings which they themselves do not feel.

In 1837 a minor ruler, the King of Hanover, an Englishman by birth brought to Hanover by a dynastic accident, revoked the basic law proclaimed a few years earlier in the wake of the July revolution in Paris. He wanted to make his own decisions undisturbed by the modern disease of parliamentarianism. Seven professors of the University of Göttingen protested, among them such famous scholars as the liberal historian Dahlmann and the celebrated philologists and collectors of fairy tales, the brothers Grimm. Thereupon the King dismissed them. This was another relatively harmless incident compared with what later generations became accustomed to. However, the effect of an element depends on the chemical solution in which it is mixed. So great was the respect for law in Germany and so profound the veneration for great scholars that the dismissal of the ‘seven’ unleashed a tremendous storm of indignation.

People fought for copies of the Grimms’ and Dahlmann’s letters of protest. An association was formed which went on paying their salaries. The excitement was so great that the southern German states appealed to the Confederation to restore the Hanoverian constitution. The royal Don Quixote had wanted to show the professors who was the master: ‘Professors, actors and whores can always be had.’ Now the professors showed that they were the masters, the most respected class in the land; that the power of public opinion was greater than that of traditional authority. The middle class, the young Friedrich Engels remarked at this period, ruled directly in Britain and France and indirectly in Germany, through public opinion. There was some truth in this statement, in spite of newspaper censorship and supervision

of universities, and in spite of the absence of a great forum like the parliaments of western Europe.

The dismissal of the 'Göttingen seven' was overshadowed in the same year by an event which roused public opinion even more: the arrest by Prussian police of the Archbishop Droste of Cologne. This act had been preceded by long negotiations between the state and the Archbishop on the subject of the training of priests. The state wanted this training to take place at its new University of Bonn, where there were liberal theologians sympathetic to historical research, whereas the Archbishop insisted that the priests should be educated at his seminary. The state was to keep its hands off these matters, which were the closest concern of the church. Another subject of dispute was the question of mixed marriages. The Bishop, on papal instructions, wanted to give his blessing only if couples were prepared to bring up their children in the Catholic faith. The state wanted some relaxation of this rule and had got it from Droste's predecessor. Prussia was unaccustomed to tolerating a foreign, independent power within its frontiers. The recalcitrant Archbishop was removed from his See and taken to the fortress of Minden. Not since Napoleon had kidnapped the Pope and taken him to France had anyone dared to do such a thing to a high church dignitary. Now it was done not by a revolutionary dictator, but by the pious, conservative Prussian state. A wave of indignation swept across Catholic Germany. Public opinion seized eagerly upon a conflict which concerned the whole German nation and made national discussion possible, although it was confined to the spiritual plane. Dozens of pamphlets were published. In Munich the aged Görres made a powerful intervention; his leaflet *Athanasius* was the revenge of the Rhinelander on the Prussian state which had persecuted him and would have broken him had he been less resilient. What Görres now elaborated contained internal contradictions. He wanted the church to be free from the state, mistress of its own sacred house, and yet recognized at the same time by the state as the great spiritual force in the life of the nation. The state must not control the church, nor must the two be separated, because life cannot be neatly divided into compartments and

because such a separation must lead to control of the state over the church and then to control of revolution over the state. The absolute Prussian state, the bureaucratic kingdom, rationalism, atheism and revolution – Görres saw them all as the same threat, as one and the same enemy, the enemy of German freedom, piety and order. His words struck home and powerfully affected people in the same way as did all the writings of this great publicist. In the following year he founded in Munich the *Historisch-Politischen Blätter für das Katholische Deutschland* (Historical and Political Journal for Catholic Germany), a journal that was conservative and nationalistic as well as strongly pro-Bavarian and anti-Prussian. Later it fought against the unification of Germany by Prussia, as long as it could do so with an atom of hope.

In 1840 there occurred the death of the last ruler of the Napoleonic era, the aged Frederick William III of Prussia. He was succeeded as absolute ruler of fifteen million Prussians by his eldest son, Frederick William IV – a change of historic importance. The oppressive symbol of the old age was dead and buried; the new man was known to be more gifted than his predecessor and no friend of his father's 'enlightened' bureaucratic system.

There was universal agreement [wrote Karl Marx] that the old system had had its day and would have to be abandoned, and what people had silently endured under the old King was now openly pronounced to be unbearable . . . In dilettantist fashion he [Frederick William IV] had acquired some knowledge of the elements of most branches of learning and therefore considered himself sufficiently informed to regard his judgement on every matter as decisive. He was convinced that he was a first-class speaker and there was certainly no commercial traveller in Berlin who could surpass him in supposed wit and volubility . . . No sooner had his father's death loosened the glib tongue of the new King than he began to make countless speeches proclaiming his intentions . . .

The picture is drawn with Marxian malice, but Marxian malice sometimes hits the mark.

Frederick William IV was one of those personalities who accidentally find themselves at a parting of the ways in history. He could have turned one way or another. He was far from being

a great man, but he was so placed that his character had a decisive influence, whether he acted or not. He was intelligent, full of good intentions, educated, longed for affection and was appreciative of beauty. But he was weak and a prey to temporary influences, a complacent improviser, dependent on advisers whom he liked to dupe, superstitious, arrogant and faithless. In the end he became insane. His ideas were those of the romantic at odds with his age. He wanted to rule with the consent of the people, but this consent must find medieval expression, and society must be a hierarchy consisting of happy peasants, honest townsmen, pious clergy, faithful nobles, the prince among his vassals. In 1845 there could be no such society. The liberals wanted something different and the monarch was disgusted to find that they despised his noble aim.

The contemptible Jewish clique [he wrote to a friend] strikes daily by word and example at the root of the German character; it does not (unlike myself) want to distinguish between the estates which alone can form a German nation; it wants to throw all the estates together . . .

Frederick William IV dreamt also of a united Germany – which he usually spelt *Deutschland* after a patriotic fashion which had sprung up around 1813. The Empire must be re-established in its former glory, under the Habsburgs, and in it there would be a suitable place for the King of Prussia as *Reichs-Erzfeldherr*. Such ideas were even more foolish in the eighteen-forties than they sound today. Our age is confused and devoid of ideas; it does not know what it wants and therefore anything seems possible. But in 1845 people knew exactly what they wanted. They had ideas in which they believed, eminently bourgeois and sober ideas.

The new reign began well. There was an amnesty for political prisoners, and the victims of the persecutions of 1819 were rehabilitated. Towards France, which had just revived an unfortunate demand for the Rhineland, Frederick William adopted a markedly nationalistic attitude. Concessions, which put a temporary stop to the conflict between church and state, were made to the Catholic Church. Archbishop Droste was allowed to return to Cologne. The provincial parliaments and the press were

given greater freedom. Metternich and the Tsar were no longer Berlin's polar stars. For the first time since 1815 Prussia seemed to deserve to be Germany's political and moral leader. Then nothing happened. The King temporized, feasted and talked. 'The child is happy,' commented one of his friends, 'when the bird which it holds fluttering by a string behaves as though it were a free bird; but at no price would it cut the string and turn illusion into reality.' Six years passed in this fashion, years of oracular pronouncement, promise and retraction, years of development; years also of bad harvests and famine.

In 1843 the *Rheinische Zeitung*, edited by a Dr Marx in Cologne, was banned 'because of licentiousness of expression and opinion'. It is easy to ban newspapers; sometimes, however, it is less easy to suppress what finds expression in them. In the summer of 1844 the linen-weavers of the small Silesian town of Peterswaldau acted in a strange and frightening fashion. They ganged together, two thousand of them, destroyed the houses of rich manufacturers, demolished factories and demanded higher wages. Investigations revealed the dreadful conditions under which they lived. The fault lay with the world market and the labour market which favoured the employers. *Blutgericht* (Blood Judgements), the anonymous song, describes how the weavers' employers used their advantage.

*Ihr Schurken all, ihr Satansbrut,
Ihr höllischen Dämonen,
Ihr fresset der Armen Hab und Gut,
Und Fluch wird Euch zum Lohne . . . **

There are another twenty-four verses in similar vein, the strongest indictment of early capitalism ever written in verse.

Frederick William was moved by reports of the misery and gave from his privy purse. Charitable organizations also helped, but the root of the evil remained untouched. The Prussian bureaucracy failed to grapple with this problem or with that of the famine that raged in Silesia and East Prussia in the winter of

* All you scoundrels, you brood of Satan, you demons of hell, you gobble up the goods and chattels of the poor: a curse shall be your reward . . .

1847. The state had no parliamentary institutions, but in the economic sphere it was all too liberal. Wages, like other prices, were governed by the law of supply and demand. What was really happening and was really needed was not understood. It was grasped, after a fashion, by the sinister individuals whom people had taken to calling the 'Communist Sect', a loose group with extreme aims.

In 1847 the King of Prussia decided to make a move on the constitutional question. He convened representatives of the nation in Berlin. They were not, however, the type of popular representatives from whom public opinion expected salvation, nor even the modest enough type to which the southern Germans had been accustomed for decades. They consisted merely of representatives of the provinces, the 'United Estates', heads of former imperial, 'mediatized' noble families, and elected representatives of the minor nobility, the towns and the peasants. In addition, the King formed the aristocracy into a separate *Herrenkurie*, an imitation of the House of Lords. Only questions of finance were to be discussed jointly by all the estates. In fact, however, it probably does not matter much how a parliament is elected, its better members will always represent, if not the 'people', the opinions current at the moment. Public opinion did not like the 'United Diet'. The Austrian Ambassador in Berlin reported: 'The arrangement is out of tune with the needs of the age, if only because the statute establishing the estates lacks the prerequisite of a modern constitution.' More important was the fact that the United Diet did not like itself, and in that way its members demonstrated that, though chosen in a bizarre manner, they basically represented the politically interested classes of the nation. The United Diet was composed of senior civil servants, mayors, merchants and bankers – 'Rhenish travellers in wine', a Prussian landowner forced to work with this rabble, called them scornfully – as well as of liberal aristocrats. All in all it was an assembly of high calibre, for indeed the period was characterized by a high level of education. Except in the Upper House only a very few members spoke and voted in line with the King's ideas. The majority presented classical liberal demands, maintaining

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that they were not the estates which the late King had often promised, and that as long as their rights, particularly those of being convened at regular intervals and of approving taxes and loans, were not clearly defined they could not accept responsibility in whole or in part. The decisive vote was on the so-called *Ostbahn*, the railway line from Berlin to Königsberg, which the government intended to build itself, since, in spite of state guarantees, no private company could be found for this unprofitable enterprise. A loan of thirty million thalers was required which the assembly refused to approve; even a majority of the East Prussian delegates put principles above the material interests of their province. A little later the King ungraciously dissolved the Diet. It had discussed and prepared a good deal; the mere fact that uncensored reports of its deliberations were permitted to appear in the press considerably increased the tempo of public opinion. But nothing was solved; the prophecy of the French Minister, Guizot, that the United Diet in Prussia would 'change the world' remained unfulfilled.

What did shortly change the European scene – to the extent that politics can – was a series of events which originated once again in Paris.

5. *Germany and its Neighbours*

In the nineteenth century 'history' meant mainly diplomatic history; Leopold Ranke, the great initiator of archival studies, was a master of this subject. The European peoples or states were regarded as a group of powers who perpetually measured themselves against each other, who fought one another and, while fighting their battles, proved themselves in 'the realm of ideas'. Catholic powers faced Protestant powers, despotic states confronted liberal states, and the principle of hegemony faced the principle of multiple independence. For Ranke and his disciples the conflict was not senseless: God was at work and the leader

who created a new great power achieved a degree of immortality. Spain, Austria, France, Britain, Russia, Sweden, Bavaria, Holland and Prussia were majestic figures on God's chessboard. The virtuosos of militant foreign policy, Richelieu, Wallenstein, Oxenstierna, Mazarin, Louis XIV, William III, Eugène of Savoy, Marlborough, Pitt, Kaunitz and Frederick the Great were heroes whose thoughts and actions needed scientific investigation. Purely social and economic factors were trifles, means to the end which lay in foreign policy.

During the years under discussion foreign policy was not, however, the main preoccupation of the European states. They were tired of war; after 1815 they lost the feeling, which governments had had before and were to have again, that they were playing a continuous, dangerously enjoyable game against each other. Judged by the standards of our own times it is truly remarkable for how long there was no major diplomatic crisis. At first there was the European congress system. Later people spoke of an Anglo-French 'liberal' front against the three absolutist powers of the East, Austria, Prussia and Russia. But these fronts were vague and there was no question of irreconcilable differences or ideological crusades. Britain and Russia sometimes joined forces – for example over the question of Greek independence – and so too did Britain, Austria and Prussia. Interests varied and changed without the deadly seriousness which had characterized European politics at the beginning of the century.

Three powers above all acted as the guardians of peace, the three main conquerors of Napoleon: Britain, Russia and Austria. Britain flooded the Continent with its industrial products and ruled on the seven seas. It decided the dispute over the independence of South America but allowed France in Spain, and Austria in Italy, to do as they liked. Tsar Nicholas I watched over the graveyard quiet of eastern Europe and he in turn was watched by the German and Italian princes. The capital of the European monarchies, their stronghold and the model for their way of life, was not Potsdam or Vienna but St Petersburg. In 1830 the Tsar dearly wanted to arrange things in his own way in France and the Netherlands, but the Polish rising stopped him. Austria was

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another guardian of the existing order, but not dynamically. Russia could and wanted to expand and had tremendous potential strength. After 1815 there was no lack of prophets who in horror imputed to Russia both the will and the ability to dominate the world. With Austria there was never the slightest question of this. The Empire of the Habsburgs had no centre, served no nation, was constantly in need of money, and had for its leader the intelligent, pessimistic Metternich who was only interested in preserving the existing system. He was the last person to want to follow in Napoleon's footsteps. Austria ruled in Italy through its armies and led in Germany through its prestige and the skill and intrigues of its Foreign Minister. But it only wanted to preserve the *status quo*. Where there was a threat of change, Metternich intervened if he safely could, as in Italy. The revolutions in South America, Greece, France and Belgium he allowed to happen. Towards the end of his long rule, old, haughty and despairing, he allowed almost everything to happen.

The fact that Austria regarded the policing of Italy as its main military task and otherwise permitted its military machinery to rot, might have given the better-ruled Prussian state certain opportunities in Germany. The Prussia of Frederick William III, however, was as reluctant to embark on adventures as Metternich's Austria. Prussia also looked to the Tsar whenever it moved, and the Tsar did not tolerate revolutionary experiments in Germany. Twice events in France forced the Prussian army to adopt an attitude which amounted to the protection of all Germany: in 1830 when it was uncertain how the beneficiaries of the July revolution in Paris would behave on the European stage, and again in 1840. Louis Philippe was neither a revolutionary nor an imperialist but a frightened and very peace-loving statesman. He preferred to belong to the councils of the conservative powers rather than to challenge them. Yet during the whole of the eighteen years that he wore the constitutional crown of thorns the citizen-king was in a delicate position. The national revolution had made him king and had been disappointed by his upper middle-class system of government. He was therefore anxious to flatter French nationalism, if it was possible to do so without

much risk. Hence the diplomatic crisis of 1840. It centred in the East, a forerunner of later crises. France made common cause with the Pasha of Egypt, who was about to rise against his Turkish overlord and to take Syria from him. Britain reacted; it no more wanted France in Egypt now than in Napoleon's time. Louis Philippe's eastern policy achieved what the July revolution had failed to do: at once France, as in 1814, faced the united Great Powers, Britain, Russia, Austria and even Prussia. The ways of foreign policy are strange. Russia and Britain now threatened France with war over Turkey, and fourteen years later Britain and France went to war against Russia, again over Turkey.

The Rhineland had nothing to do with Egypt and Syria, but then there is no connection either between militant attitudes and reason. Forced to give way in the eastern Mediterranean, French nationalism let it be known through its press that the Rhine was still France's natural frontier and that there could be no lasting peace in Europe until it was also France's frontier on the map. Thiers, the Prime Minister, a professional admirer of Napoleon, did not dissociate himself from this opinion. The German reaction was surprising. There was an upsurge of nationalism, a feeling of being threatened, an enthusiastic readiness to defend the threatened territory, such as there had not been since 1813 – and even then it had not affected the whole country in the same way. Topical songs voiced the general feeling: 'They shall not have it, the free German Rhine' and 'Like thunder rolls the cry, to the Rhine, to the German, German Rhine ...' These were new sounds, shriller than those of 1813. In those days a few writers had tried to make the Rhine into a kind of national deity, a majestic symbol of German splendour – 'the Rhine, Germany's river, not Germany's frontier'. Now this attitude caught on among the masses. The new German river cult conflicted with the older French idea which, while claiming to be more sensible, was no less curious, namely that the Rhine was France's 'natural', strategically vital frontier. The events of the war of 1814 ought to have disillusioned the French; the Allies had crossed the Rhine, then France's frontier, without difficulty, and had marched straight to Paris. Fixed ideas, however, are not defeated that

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quickly. If superstitious faith in 'strategic frontiers', rivers and chains of hills exists even today, what can we expect from our great-great-grandfathers?

The French were hurt and surprised; they had not meant to give offence. Least of all the liberals who had always regarded German liberalism as their ally. Why become so excited over a piece of land which Nature happened to have given to France? Could Prussia not find compensation on the North Sea or in Lower Saxony, and Germany as a whole on the Danube? Lamartine wrote the *Marseillaise de la paix*:

*Nations! mot pompeux pour dire barbarie!
L'amour s'arrête-t-il où s'arrêtent vos pas?
Déchirez ces drapeaux; une autre voix vous crie:
L'égoïsme et la haine ont seul une patrie,
La fraternité n'en a pas!*

He sent his well-meant product to Nikolaus Becker, author of *They shall not have it, the free German Rhine*, who, unmoved, sent the French poet his own song by way of thanks. It was an unfortunate coincidence that both nations should have chosen the Rhine as their symbol of national feeling, as both could have chosen many other beautiful things not threatened by anyone, forests, rivers and mountains, in the interior of their country. As a result the Rhine became the symbol of Franco-German enmity, later called an 'hereditary enmity'. As Prussia was the German military power on the Rhine and used firm language during the crisis of 1840, it was Prussia and not Austria which earned national glory for the *Watch on the Rhine*. This time the danger passed by. Louis Philippe, a born pacifist, drew back and dismissed his militant Prime Minister. But an echo of the excitement lingered on. Or was it the distant sound of future trouble? Emotionally there was something amiss between the two nations which had such close ties and which had existed side by side from the beginning of time. The discord was only emotional, but so essentially is foreign policy. Without the likes and dislikes which individuals invent and transmit to the masses, without sportive competition, pride, fear and hatred based on sheer ignorance,

there would be no international political conflicts. It is claimed that they are of an 'economic' nature. But this is nonsense, a rationalization of the irrational. What economic interests set the French and the Germans against each other?

The story of the relationship between the two neighbour nations and their opinion of each other is a curious, bitter story. Most of the time France did not regard Germany as its enemy. In the sixteenth and seventeenth century the enemy was the House of Habsburg, representing the union of Spain, Italy, Burgundy and Austria, whereas Germany proper, particularly Protestant Germany, seemed a natural ally. In the eighteenth century the enemy was Britain, mistress of the seas, as well as the Habsburgs. Prussia appeared as the progressive power whose alliance was sought. The situation remained the same during the Revolution and Napoleon's day. What other nation was such an apt pupil of the harsh Emperor, or rose so late and so hesitatingly against him? After 1814 French patriots blamed the British and the Russians for their fall from the imperial heights, but not the Germans. The influence of German civilization in France was never stronger than after Napoleon's fall, a development which may have been connected with France's confusion and exhaustion after Waterloo and which received considerable stimulus from books like Madame de Staël's *De l'Allemagne*. The French threw themselves on German philosophy, Kant and Hegel, Goethe, Schiller and the Romantics. Germany was seen as the country which had produced these great men, a philosophical, poetical, musical, non-political country. And as these were good qualities which France was conscious of having sacrificed to politics and activity of the intellect, the French were not at all anti-German.

After 1830 when things began to move again in Europe, there were plenty of writers in Paris who thought about Germany's future. Germany must become politically conscious, it could not remain Madame de Staël's romantic fairyland for ever. It would unite and become a nation-state like the others. But this unity, achieved nobly and freely, even if under Prussian leadership, need not constitute a threat to France. On the contrary, were not the two nations really meant for each other? Was it not their common

task to be Europe's most powerful force and to keep Russia in check? In 1835 Eugène Lerminier expressed the opinion that Germany would fall under Russia's spell unless it allied itself with France. This, roughly, was the view of the most famous liberals, Lamartine, Victor Hugo and Alexis de Tocqueville. The only dissenting voice was that of the philosopher of history, Edgar Quinet. He had gone to Heidelberg in the twenties as a lover of German philosophy and had lived there for ten years and married the daughter of a German professor. When he returned to France in 1837 he was Germany's enemy. For him Germany was no longer the country described with too much affection by Madame de Staël, the country of metaphysicians and dreamers. It was a materialistic and political country, in the grip of a nationalism of which the French had no conception. '... The Germans, awakened by their poets, have lately made themselves the object of a self-worship which will lead to their destruction.' Particularly in Prussia the 'old cosmopolitan objectivity' had given way to an 'irritable, choleric nationalism', and thanks to its efficiency and its efforts to build a modern society the Prussian state would sooner or later make the rest of Germany conform to its pattern. Everything was ready, only the great man was still missing. Once he appeared, woe betide France. An arrogant Germany, barren of lofty ideas but practically superior, would attack its western neighbours and demand back all the provinces lost since the Middle Ages.

Was Quinet right? Was the Germany of the end of the *Biedermeier* period as malevolently self-idolatrous as he claimed? The disappointed lover must have seen something, because we who came after him know all too well how his predictions came true. Those who make accurate historical predictions perceive something which exists but which most people fail to see because it is as yet barely visible. Especially in the eighteen-thirties, Germany's development did not seem a threat to its neighbours. On the contrary, whereas the *Burschenschaften* after 1814 had been anti-French, German liberalism was not, and radicalism, as expressed for example at the gathering at Hambach, least of all. The radicals wanted a republic in the style of the French one of 1792, and a

European, republican league of nations. They looked upon France as the great friend and teacher. 'Long live the Franks, the brothers of the Germans, who respect our nationality and independence' – ended one of the most striking speeches at Hambach. This was the kind of thing both French and German radicals liked to hear. Those who envisaged other alliances or other conflicts were few in number.

6. Philosophy and Politics

No single figure or group of figures dominates the thirties and forties. The quiet, independent writers, Franz Grillparzer the dramatist or Adalbert Stifter the novelist, may mean more to us today than the political, philosophical authors who played such an important role in Germany around 1840. Yet while the former can hardly be accorded a mention in a political history, the latter, often inferior as human beings, indicate what was happening. Moreover, there were men of genius among them such as Heinrich Heine and Karl Marx and, later, Nietzsche.

In the official Germany the King's people felt happy and reasonably secure; the study of German and Greek was cultivated, grand opera and romantic poetry encouraged; and provincial capitals were beautified with Greek temples, Italian Renaissance palaces and collections of medieval pictures. This Germany looked to the distant past, to antiquity, and to more recent times in which the greatest name was Goethe. In the eighteenth century monarchs like Frederick the Great and Joseph II had been in advance of their age, a situation which probably had done the monarchical principle no good. Kings should be representative of the traditional aspect of their time, rather than of what points to the future.

Close to the royal sphere were the conservative scholars, the advisers of the kings, the historian Leopold von Ranke, the political theorist Friedrich Julius Stahl; thinkers who were

Christian and monarchist without necessarily being against constitutional government. Ranke lived to a very old age, to the end of the century, but by education and mental make-up he belonged to the beginning of the century. He was opposed to violent contrasts; at once cosmopolitan, patriotic and loyal to Prussia and Bavaria, the states which he served, he was a royal servant through and through, tolerant, eager to understand, open to the world, anxious to avoid the ultimate and most difficult questions, always prepared to believe that history was doing the right thing and that victory and power went to good men. As a historian he knew that the political systems of his day were the result of historical development. However, since they were there, they must be upheld and must be changed only gradually and wisely.

Nineteenth-century Germany produced no great conservative philosophy of state and society such as Britain had possessed since Edmund Burke. This was partly because the German nation had no state. A thinker who spoke in the name of all Germans and offered a nationalistic programme, ceased at once to be 'conservative' because he aimed at something that did not exist, like the great thunderers of the time of the War of Liberation, Stein, Arndt and Görres. In those days the conservatives had been the circle round Metternich, and its surviving members were still conservatives. But this circle was so Austro-European and international that it is hardly possible to speak of German conservatism. Then there were journalists, professors and writers whose influence was largely confined to a particular German state, to Austria, Bavaria, Prussia or Württemberg. Görres for example, the Rhinelander who late in life had become a Bavarian, was now a conservative thinker who exerted himself for Bavaria, not for Prussia. Görres the Catholic valiantly fought with his pen against the encroachments of the Prussian state on the Catholic Church. Indeed, the religious issue was another obstacle to the formation of a nationalistic conservative school of thought. While in Catholic monarchies like Bavaria and Austria Catholics could be happy and conservative-minded, it was more difficult for them under Prussia's Protestant authority, where conflicts were frequent and Catholics were tempted to form unreliable alliances

of convenience with other rebel elements. Religion binds people with established beliefs and authority. To that extent all religion is conservative, even substitute religions like Communism, once they are established. Liberalism as such was not anti-religious, though it was anti-authoritarian. It tended to act as a liberating force and in the last resort to make religion a private matter. Above all it believed in science. Once men put their trust wholly in positive knowledge it is impossible to say where they will end up. In that sense religion in all its ecclesiastical manifestations was at war with liberalism. But Germany's religious division prevented the establishment of clear fronts. When Protestant Prussia, which the aged Frederick William wanted to be a religious, authoritarian state, came into conflict with the Catholic Church, Catholic Germany rebelled against Prussia – a state which was, or should have been, its ally in the fight against liberalism. The two parties accused each other of recalcitrance, lawlessness and aggressive bids for power. Inevitably both came into contact with the common enemy. Prussia did so, because it defended the control of the church by the state and the supremacy of the state in the sphere of morality – a late liberal thesis – and Catholicism did so because it rebelled for one reason or another against the authority of the King of Prussia.

In the predominantly Protestant parts of Prussia, in the hierarchical structure of the kingdom, Luther's heritage constituted a conserving element; it conserved the state to which the subject owed blind obedience, even if the state did things that were illegal and not at all conservative. Luther had taught that the Christian is directly responsible to God. Authority had a different responsibility; it must wield a sharp sword in this world where ideal ends are unattainable and order must be preserved, even at a high price, because men are disobedient and wicked. This was no developed political philosophy but a simple and instinctive faith which expressed itself more strongly in the self-assured, threatening speeches made by the young deputy von Bismarck in the United Diet than in books on political philosophy. It came instinctively to those who believed in it. Fundamentally conservatism must be instinctive; it can only become a conscious,

developed philosophy when there is danger of revolution, when it is being questioned and must defend itself.

This it was now forced to do, against the liberals. Although speaking *ex officio* only in the southern German constitutional states, the liberals could speak for the whole of Germany because they were not committed to the existing system and wanted the German Confederation to become a closer union. In Baden they looked to France, in northern Germany more towards Britain. The basic demands were the same: the nation must help to shape its fate through some suitable form of representation, not so much in order to guide a strong, active state but in order to limit the state's activities so that its citizens were as far as possible left in peace to follow their own interests, protected but unrestricted. The ideal was freedom from state interference even more than power for the people. The ancestors of the liberals, the eighteenth-century 'philosophers', had believed that man was good and that God was also good, so good that man could leave Him to look after Himself and concentrate on the practical problems of this world. This was not an unchristian attitude, but it no longer contained the Lutheran fear of God and belief in the sinfulness of man. The liberals expected great things on earth, without too much hard fighting and without tragedies. The offshoot of liberal Germany was radical Germany – republicans, democrats and, as we have seen, international nationalists.

Less in evidence but no less important were the activities of solitary social thinkers and philosophical writers. Not given to pomp and circumstance, they lived alone or in small groups, often in insecurity and poverty, often at odds with each other.

We have referred earlier to the state professors, the most celebrated of whom from the forties to the seventies was Leopold von Ranke. In the twenties and until his death in 1831 this position had been occupied by Hegel, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Berlin. The heritage of this great thinker, the 'Prussian political philosopher' as he has often been called, fell into strange hands. He who in his lifetime had been the exponent of obedience, became after his death the exponent of revolution. This was no mere caprice of the history of ideas, rich though it is

in surprises and paradoxical allegiances. Hegel's work was ambiguous and explosive. So was the age which it claimed to express in philosophical terms, and on which, in spite of all extravagance, it really had a direct bearing. Hegel was aware of his time. He is the precursor of all those who make it their profession to talk about their times and who try to understand what is happening.

Moreover his later publications are characterized by a profound sadness. His work was intended to mark the end of a prolonged development, not of one epoch but of a succession of epochs, of an eternity; it was intended as climax, fulfilment and end. Religion had spent itself, art had spent itself. Not they but philosophy now satisfied man's noblest desires. But as philosophy had said its last word in Hegel's writings, what then remained to be done after him? Nothing, or something completely different, for which Hegel with the egoism of the great man made no attempt to prepare his pupils. He himself was gloomy, particularly after the July revolution. He felt that he was taking the glory of a thousand years with him into the grave. However, if his philosophy was right, then his forebodings must apply also to reality because his thesis was that historical reality and philosophy matched each other, that they were one and the same thing. People were living on the brink of a new age. The French Revolution itself had been only a prologue to other unimaginable changes.

It was left to the disciples after the master's death to interpret the new age. If Hegel's philosophy had been true, then it could not remain true: it must be treated as Hegel had treated all earlier philosophy, 'set aside', affirmed and denied at the same time. Hegel had started life as a Protestant and had somehow managed to bring Christianity even into his mature philosophy. His disciples or their disciples broke with Christianity and became atheists – an attitude which could be derived from Hegel's philosophy, if it was followed to its logical conclusion. They took it upon themselves to explain Christianity, like all religious belief, historically, as a reflection of social reality, as a self-misunderstanding. Hegel had spoken much of the reconciliation of idea and reality, but he had achieved this reconciliation only in the

mind, through his philosophy; it was for philosophy to recognize retrospectively that what happened in reality was reasonable. Hegel's successors, however, claimed that reality was not reasonable but must be *made* reasonable, not by dreams but by political action. Politics, understood rightly, was thus in the end the true philosophy. Hegel had spoken of the 'truth of power', and had meant the power of the state, of kings, of victorious armies. His followers spoke of the truth of revolutions, of majorities, of mass action. There was no need to fear the masses as Hegel had feared them. The rights of the private individual were not as important as the liberals believed. The state could not be too powerful, provided it was a scientifically directed state, free from all superstition. Such a state would do away with the remains of the Middle Ages and make men equal.

Thus, very briefly, the 'Young Hegelians', Ludwig Feuerbach, Arnold Ruge and Bruno Bauer. It is difficult to say whether Hegel's philosophy did them and their cause any good. Faith in the liberating power of the natural sciences, republicanism and socialism existed in Britain, in France and elsewhere in Germany. To the modern reader the works of a socialist of the eighteenth-thirties, like the medical student Georg Büchner who despised Hegel's dialectic, have a much greater appeal than the writings of the Young Hegelians. Büchner, a poet of genius, went straight for his goal; in his *Hessische Landbote*, realities were discussed forcefully and directly. The Young Hegelians knew everything; thanks to Hegel they held the key to all mysteries. But they had not forged the delicate intellectual tools which they used and had not suffered the creative agonies of the young Hegel. Their intellectual and human achievement therefore fell short of their claims. They were self-confident as disciples of a great master are, dogmatic, anxious to outdo one another, either close friends or bitter enemies. A new type developed with them, that of the 'intellectual', the writer who is at odds with the public, the state and the existing system. Later, when Germany was liberal, such people were left alone. In the thirties they struggled with the censor, and their publications were banned because governments were sufficiently intelligent to notice signs of sinister happenings;

whereupon they were forced to find a new home for a few years.

The 'Communist' sect was intellectually more modest and at first had no connection with the Young Hegelians. Its members were workers and craftsmen who from their experiences and observations, from Christian tradition and the writings of French and English socialists, drew their own simple conclusion: the terrible misery of the industrialized world must be redressed by the abolition of private property. This idea was in the air. People were afraid not so much because there was a strong Communist organization – which there was not – but because the idea was in the air; because the misery of factory workers cried out for redress and the state provided none. The fear of Communism in the forties came from the bad conscience of society.

7. *Heinrich Heine*

The poet Heinrich Heine is usually regarded as a member of the literary movement known to its members and to others as 'Young Germany'; it was referred to as such, for example, in a decision of the German Confederation of 1835 threatening members of the group with punishment because of 'their unconcealed attempts in bellettristic writings accessible to all classes of readers, to make the most outrageous attacks on the Christian religion, to denigrate existing conditions and to destroy all decency and propriety'. Young Germany, which started a little earlier than the Young Hegelians, blossomed in the thirties. Its members were more successful, less ascetic and less scientific than the Young Hegelians. Its means of expression were political journalism, lyrics, travel books, novels and plays. Little of the work of this school has survived. Only Heinrich Heine is immortal and anyone concerned with modern German history must try to describe as best he can his character and his ideas.

It is true that there have been purer German poets. His

contemporaries, Rückert, Eichendorff and Uhland, were more innocent than Heine, closer to the ordinary people and happier; as artists they were more unassuming, but more reliable. Heine, to whom writing verse came easily, was occasionally guilty of lapses of taste. Towards the end of his life he proved that, in spite of all human limitations, he was equal to the great task entrusted to him; for six years he lay on his sick bed dying slowly and painfully of spinal consumption and during this time he wrote his most brilliant prose, his most profound, sad and beautiful poems.

He was a Jew from the Rhineland. Shortly after the July revolution he came to Paris as a born rebel delighted by the great news. There he remained until his death. As one cannot live from poetry he earned his living mainly as a journalist, by contributing daily or weekly reports from Paris to the big, liberal south German newspaper, the *Augsburger Allgemeine*. In addition he interpreted German literature and philosophy for the French public. Journalism lends itself to unpremeditated, irresponsible observations; the journalist must take into account the taste of his readers and not make things too difficult for them. Heine simplified complicated issues and he has therefore been accused of frivolity, perhaps not quite without justification. Frivolous he was, or let us say modern, in concerning himself with the most serious issues without making up his mind on them. He was highly intelligent and shrewd, but he did not take sides. One day he was a German patriot, the next an emigrant who warned France of the German danger; at times he was a conservative, at others a revolutionary; now a socialist and now an aristocrat who dreaded the plebian future. He spoke eloquently on two philosophies, the enjoyment of life, the hedonism of the Greeks, and the serious, ascetic faith of the Jews (among whom he counted true Christians), and was himself attracted by both. His friends and critics and those who envied him, fanatical republicans and stout-hearted progressives, accused him of vacillation. Heine, who refused to take certain problems seriously, was perhaps more serious in his deliberate flippancy than others whose seriousness was unsullied by doubt or by understanding. They spoke for the moment, Heine for a century. Moreover he spoke exquisitely. Fifty years later

Friedrich Nietzsche said: 'How well he handles German. One day people will say that Heine and I were by far the greatest artists in the German language ...' Heine enriched and modernized German prose.

As a social critic he was influenced by Saint-Simon, one of the earliest modern socialists, who confidently believed in the future of humanity. For him the golden age lay not in the legendary past but in the future. It would become a reality by harnessing the natural sciences for the needs of man. All men would find work, all would be well housed and clothed and would eat and drink to their hearts' content. The best would rule, an élite of scholars and scientific planners – technocrats as we should say today. This vision appealed to Heine, who enjoyed his food and drink and felt sorry for the poor.

He foresaw the inevitable annihilation of the rich and their state by the poor, the 'dangerous classes' as they were called in France at the time. His prescience did not make him happy, yet he despised the existing social order; his attitude was that of one who was above or outside it. It was as though Heine was bewitched by Communism. In his articles he constantly talked about it at a time when only a very few people concerned themselves with it. He spoke of it more with dread than hope, as of an elemental movement of the age, immune to politics.

Communism is the secret name of the terrible antagonist who confronts the present-day bourgeois regime with proletarian domination and all its consequences. There will be a terrible duel ... Though Communism is at present little talked about, vegetating in forgotten attics on wretched straw pallets, it is nevertheless the dismal hero destined to play a great, if transitory part in the modern tragedy ... (20 June 1842).

Three weeks later he prophesied that a European war would develop into a social world revolution from which would emerge an iron Communist dictatorship,

the old, absolutist tradition ... but in different clothes and with new catch-phrases and slogans ... Maybe there will then only be *one* shepherd and *one* flock, a free shepherd with an iron crook and an identically shorn, identically bleating human herd. Confused, sombre

times loom ahead, and the prophet who might want to write a new apocalypse would need to invent entirely new beasts, and such frightening ones that St John's animal symbols would appear like gentle doves and amoretti by comparison . . . I advise our grandchildren to be born with very thick skins.

Then again he saw Communism not as a system under which men would enjoy the material benefits of life but as one under which they would slave at their jobs with dreary monotony; once he even predicted the marriage of the Catholic Church with the Communists and foresaw an empire of asceticism, joylessness and strict control of ideas as the child of this union. Heine made himself few friends by such prophecies. The conservatives, the good German citizens, regarded him as a rebel and a frivolous wit. The Left saw in him a faithless ally, a socialist who was afraid of the revolution, who took back today what he had said yesterday and who behaved like an aristocrat. It is true that Heine, the artist, was both an aristocrat and a rebel. He hated the rule of the old military and noble caste, particularly in Prussia, despised the rule of the financiers, particularly in France, and yet feared a levelling reign of terror by the people. He approved of constitutional or parliamentary monarchy and paid compliments to Louis Philippe for which the Prime Minister of the citizen-King temporarily rewarded him with a pension. The only thing that was of vital interest to him was that there should be freedom to mock as seriously as he did himself; freedom to speak the truth and to speak it well. He hated everything that was not genuine, everything that was ugly and exaggerated for partisan purposes.

Heine was rightly known as a friend of all that went under the collective term 'progressive': industry and technical science, liberalism, democracy and socialism. But while he was known as such and persecuted for it by official Germany he suddenly intimated to the adherents of the same cause that he was not one of them, because he, the artist, had different values to defend and because he saw further than they. He was a modern who did not like the modern age. He, the fighter for 'freedom', the enemy of 'reaction', had no faith in the freedom of the coming 'spring of the peoples' or in national democracy; he saw through the con-

traditions of the movement which to its followers seemed simple and certain to bring happiness. Would it not bring war instead of the promised peace, and brutal clamour instead of a peaceful, enduring way of life? How could his art, his song, survive if politics became increasingly important?

Heine, therefore, could not identify himself with any one of the great causes that excited his compatriots at home or in exile; the servant of beauty and the intellect cannot do this. He could only see things with gay, sarcastic or melancholy eyes, without committing himself. Yet just because he was detached, sometimes to the point of treachery, his work has remained more alive than that of his more resolute contemporaries.

Those who had no doubts, who were reliable, were equally irritated by Heine's attitude towards Germany. At times he loved it and could not do otherwise. He had been born there and spoke its language; he was only a young man when he wrote the poems which have become part of Germany's national heritage. Sick and lonely in exile, he longed for home. Yet at other times he mocked his compatriots in a manner which they could not forgive for their philistinism, their provincialism, their weakness for titles, their bureaucrats, soldiers and thirty-six monarchs. In an extremely witty poem he says that if there were ever to be a German revolution the Germans would not treat their kings as roughly as the British and the French had treated theirs:

*Franzosen und Briten sind von Natur
Ganz ohne Gemüt; Gemüt hat nur
Der Deutsche, er wird gemütlich bleiben
Sogar im terroristischen Treiben.
Der Deutsche wird die Majestät
Behandeln stets mit Pietät . . .**

No sooner had Heine written verses of this kind and mocked at the Germans for their lamb-like patience than he warned the French that the German revolution of the future would far exceed theirs in terror.

*Frenchmen and Britons are by nature completely soulless; only Germans have souls. They will remain soulful even when terror reigns. Germans will always treat royalty with reverence . . .

A drama will be enacted in Germany compared with which the French Revolution will seem like a harmless idyll. Christianity may have restrained the martial ardour of the Teutons for a time, but it did not destroy it; now that the restraining talisman, the cross, has rotted away, the old frenzied madness will break out again.

The French must not believe that it would be a pro-French revolution, though it might pretend to be republican and extreme. German nationalism, unlike that of the French, was not receptive to outside influences filled with missionary zeal; it was negative and aggressive, particularly towards France. 'I wish you well and therefore I tell you the bitter truth. You have more to fear from liberated Germany than from the entire Holy Alliance with all its Croats and Cossacks put together . . .' Heine toyed with things cleverly and irresponsibly. At the time it was thought in France, in Italy and in Germany too that nationalism was international, closely related to the republican and the democratic cause; that nations, once they were free and united at home, would join forces in one great league of nations. Heine did not share this view. He regarded nationalism, particularly German nationalism, as a stupid, disruptive force motivated by hatred.

Smilingly, as they came to him, he threw his ideas and premonitions on to the literary market; frivolously, people thought, but perhaps because he was averse to all solemnity, pathos and pedantry. He was at home only in Europe, yet Europe was no real home. A man without a home, without roots, cannot be effective, but he can see and speak, and that is what Heine did. His work, full of beauty, depth and passionate restraint and also of facile effects, heralded the crisis of the West. Fifty years later Nietzsche grappled with it and yet another fifty years later we all experienced it. The genius came early. He determined nothing, he achieved nothing, he helped only by rising above problems, by understanding, and by finding the perfect, conciliatory expression. That help Heine continues to give us today.

8. Karl Marx

Heine speaks somewhere of his German compatriots in Paris 'among whom the most determined and intelligent is Dr Marx'. Marx was as intelligent as Heine and though no poet he was a writer of the first rank who forced his mind into a single, narrow track. He wanted to dominate world history and force it into the track followed by his own mind. Marx was effective and still is, although his work did not have the results that he expected.

Like Heine, he was a Jew from the Rhineland but twenty-five years younger and without the experiences of the Napoleonic age. Old men of Napoleon's generation were still in power when he was born and when he was young and contemptuous, convinced that the future belonged to him and his like. He studied in Bonn and Berlin; in 1842 in Cologne he edited the *Rheinische Zeitung* which was soon banned; in 1843 he went to Paris and in 1845 to Brussels. Then, in 1848, he briefly returned to Germany, aged just thirty. The political philosophy and revolutionary strategy named after him was already complete in his mind.

A Russian who met him at a socialist gathering in Brussels describes him thus:

With a thick black head of hair, hirsute hands, his coat buttoned up crooked, he nevertheless had the appearance of a man who had the right and the power to command respect . . . His movements were angular, yet bold and self-confident. His manners were directly contrary to all social custom. Yet his demeanour was proud, with a trace of contempt, and his shrill, metallic voice was curiously in harmony with his radical judgements on men and things. He spoke only in imperatives which tolerated no opposition and which were enhanced by the tone which characterized everything that he said and which affected me almost painfully.

A few years later, Carl Schurz, an observant, intelligent German student with strong views, commented:

What Marx said was in fact full of substance, logical and clear. Yet I have never seen a man behave with such offensive, unbearable arrogance. He brushed aside any opinion that differed substantially from

his own. Anybody who contradicted him he treated with barely concealed contempt. If he disliked an argument he countered with biting sarcasm at the pitiable ignorance of the speaker or with slanderous insinuations against his motives. I well remember the cutting, contemptuous, I am tempted to say spitting, way in which he uttered the word 'bourgeois'; and he denounced as 'bourgeois', as clear examples of profound spiritual and moral debasement, all who dared to disagree with his views.

There is no doubt that this is what he seemed like – there are too many witnesses and too much agreement – and there is no doubt that he was like this. He was blessed and cursed with a tremendous intelligence which isolated him and made him haughty. He certainly had love, for his wife and his children, and he also had compassion; he was nauseated by the distress which had come with industry. His spirit was inflexible in trouble, and his loyalty to the titanic task which he had imposed on himself was absolute. These are praiseworthy virtues; but they were overshadowed by his tremendous determination to have power, and to be right and to be the only one who was right. He wanted to destroy his opponents and his critics with his sword, or as long as that was impossible, with his pen dipped in poison. Such a man cannot better the world.

Marx was the son of his age and exposed to many influences. The myth which he invented was not as original as he himself believed. The expectation of the great revolution which would one day transform the world and make it a good place for ever came to him from the eighteenth century, from France. The view that politics and society must be interpreted in the light of history, as something that developed and disappeared, he shared with the German historians of his age, with the school which was later called Historicism. The preoccupation of the age with the natural sciences led to an attempt to apply their laws to the social sciences, to assume that history behaved according to a few laws or even one great law, and that this law could be discovered. Marx was far from being the only man to make the attempt. Faith in progress, so strong in his writings, was a heritage of the preceding century, bourgeois *par excellence*. The idea of the 'class struggle',

that one social class would take over from another, was in the air in Marx's youth; the Danish-German scholar Lorenz von Stein expressed it in scientific form in a book which appeared in 1842. The French Revolution, it was said, had brought to power not the people but only the propertied middle class which shamelessly ruled the people in its own interest. Next time it would be the turn of the proletariat. We have seen how this prospect fascinated Heinrich Heine. Atheism and the explanation of religion as based on ignorance, superstition and human 'self-alienation'; utopianism and the hope that after the last, socialist revolution, the state itself with all its instruments of coercion would wither away to leave a freely productive, happy, anarchistic society; the idea that mankind was passing through a great crisis and that this crisis could be controlled through science – all these were concepts that were in the air in the thirties and cannot be attributed to one particular thinker. Taken together they contain almost the whole of 'Marxism'.

The strongest spiritual influence on Marx was that of Hegel. This he had in common with the Young Hegelians; he was closer to Arnold Ruge for example than might be thought from his scornful polemics. Hegel's philosophy was seductive to a powerful, lonely, infinitely ambitious mind, because it was as clever and full of ideas as it was violent, twisted and crazy in its claims. A man of Hegel's intelligence who followed and corrected and improved on him, might well believe that he had been chosen to give mankind an account of its history and to tell it how to make history in the future. The first claim Marx took over from Hegel, the second he added himself. Hegel, he argued, had concentrated on man's spiritual history and had explained changes in social conditions from it. This was a reversal of the true state of affairs. One must start with social reality, with economic life, with the existing legal and political situation and see spiritual matters, religion and philosophy in relation to them. In fact one must ask why man bothers to build such realms in the clouds. Was it because something was amiss in his real world where men ruled over men and exploited each other, where there were rich and poor, misery in spite of wealth, and increasing misery in spite of increasing wealth?

Man did not control the social reality which he himself had created, albeit unconsciously and without a plan – he was a stranger to himself. Therefore in his anguish he invented gods, saviours and philosophical systems designed to explain an alienated, confused, agonizing reality. But these cloud-cuckoo-lands, of which the Hegelian system was the last and most elaborate, were of no help or effect. They had to be destroyed by criticism; this, however, could not be done without an understanding of the social reality which had given rise to these ideas, without changing it and putting it in order. Therefore after Hegel's death it was no longer the task of philosophy to top the Hegelian system with another and still more elaborate system, but to recognize and change reality and to prepare the revolution scientifically; philosophy must thus no longer be pure philosophy but idea and action – action springing from the idea. 'Philosophers have only *explained* the world in different ways; what matters is that it should be *changed*.'

Marx thus arrived at a negation of philosophy which for him culminated in Hegel, and he turned from philosophy to politics. But – and this is important – his politics were based on philosophy. He rejected philosophy on its own ground, in its own jargon which he knew only too well. Later he occasionally came in contact with the working class, mainly through his friend Engels. He did not know it when he prepared the outline of his theory. He knew Hegel, the philosophers before Hegel and the Young Hegelians. The whole mumbo-jumbo of the Hegelian dialectic is present in his writings: the tension between being and consciousness, the 'coming-to-itself' of the consciousness, the 'negation of the negation', the leap from quantity to quality, and so on – all those profound ideas which frequently come close to distortion and punning.

It is therefore the task of history [writes the young Marx] when the otherworldliness of truth has disappeared to establish the truth of this world. Once the sacred figure of human self-alienation has been unmasked it will be the task of philosophy, which serves history, to unmask self-alienation in its unholy forms. Criticism of heaven thus turns into criticism of the earth, criticism of religion into criticism of justice, criticism of theology into criticism of politics.

Biting sentences which, as one reads them, sound as Carl Schurz described Marx's language, mordant, over-clever, betraying an excessive delight in thought and power.

Hegel had not wanted power. He had been careful to make no predictions. His philosophy was only what Friedrich Schiller maintained that all art must be: play, a sublime play of ideas. Such play is not science, is neither true nor false; it is only beautiful or not beautiful, profound or not profound, it either appeals or it does not appeal to us. Marx wanted to transform the Hegelian work of art into a political science, practically applicable like the natural sciences – to use it to make predictions and to give practical guidance to the revolutionary politician. He broke up the real world of politics into general concepts: 'bourgeoisie', 'proletariat', 'petty bourgeoisie', 'revolution', 'ideology'. 'The proletariat' must 'become conscious of itself' in order to 'put an end to' itself and its antithesis, the bourgeoisie; a process which, like every process dealt with by Hegelian philosophy, must be both necessary and free. The political world, however, is not rational enough to be broken up in such a manner. It does not exist to prove one man right. Philosophy, particularly Hegel's over-clever, over-elaborate philosophy, was not made for politics.

Just as future Communist leaders sometimes – not always – pursued successful policies in spite of the mumbo-jumbo which they regarded as realistic science, Marx was sometimes – not always – a successful judge of present and future. His work, though not lacking in abstruse nonsense, was full of predictions which have come true. Prophets make mistakes and history cannot be predicted in its entirety, but Marx the prophet predicted more things correctly than most of his kind. Whether he succeeded because of his half-true, half-nonsensical science or in spite of it is impossible to say. He certainly had intuition. As a political journalist and historian of his own times his achievements were great: angry, witty, endowed with the perspicacity of hatred and overpoweringly intelligent. His achievements in this sphere have dated least.

Friedrich Engels, whom he met in the forties and with whom he formed a life-long friendship, had a different nature. The son

of an industrialist from Wuppertal, he loved women and wine, was a soldier, sportsman, chivalrous and gay. Engels also began with Hegel, but in contrast to Marx soon gained practical experience as an industrialist. His first book, *The Condition of the Working Classes in England*, published in 1845, was really as the sub-title says 'based on personal experience'. Though his political predictions may have been wrong, his descriptions of social conditions were, if subjective, only too true. No more powerful accusation of unfettered capitalism has ever been written. The conditions under which men, women and children worked and lived and which Engels describes, are so shocking and heart-breaking that even today one understands and sympathizes with his false conclusion that the situation could not continue and that the day of reckoning must come and produce a terrible social explosion. In his way Engels too was conceited; he loved to hold forth and find fault even before he met Marx. Marx, whom he regarded as a genius and whom he supported and praised with chivalrous unselfishness, was the only person from whom he took orders. The two complemented each other and worked so closely together that it is often impossible to distinguish the contribution of each. Engels taught Marx something about the 'people' whom the Herr Doktor knew little about. From Marx Engels learnt how to resolve reality into concepts, the 'dialectical' approach; and later the special economic theories developed by Marx, as well as the poisonous art of polemics which, with Engels however, always retained a more human character. Together in the years 1843 to 1847 in Paris and Brussels they formed their ideas by criticism of the Young Hegelians and 'utopian' socialists. Together in the first days of 1848 they wrote the pamphlet that was to conquer half the world, the *Communist Manifesto*. It contains the quintessence of 'Marxism'; what came later was application, economic consolidation, illustration and defence, not creative development. The *Manifesto* is a work of immense persuasive force, simple and homogeneous, in spite of the complicated ideas which were worked into it. The first to be overwhelmed by it, to such an extent that they never had another idea, were its authors.

At the basis of man's history lie his economic needs, the satis-

faction of his daily wants. The way in which goods are produced and distributed determines forms of government, state and law, as well as forms of thought, philosophy, morals and religion. Ever since there has been property, since the dissolution of the primitive tribal communities, there have been social classes: a class which ruled and drew economic profit from its rule and others which were ruled, though sooner or later the latter have rebelled against the conditions imposed on them. History is thus a history of class struggles. The class which had come to power in western Europe since the eighteenth century, particularly as a result of the revolutions of 1798 and 1830, was the bourgeoisie, the capitalist class. All new ruling classes begin by accomplishing the task which history has allotted to them; otherwise they cannot become ruling classes. The bourgeoisie has tremendous accomplishments to its credit.

It has been the first to show what man's activity can bring about. It has accomplished wonders far surpassing Egyptian pyramids, Roman aqueducts and Gothic cathedrals; it has conducted expeditions that put in the shade all former exoduses of nations and crusades . . . The bourgeoisie has subjected the country to the rule of the town. It has created enormous cities, has greatly increased the urban population as compared with the rural, and has thus rescued a considerable part of the population from the idiocy of rural life . . . The bourgeoisie during its rule of scarcely one hundred years, has created more massive and more colossal productive forces than have all preceding generations together. Subjugation of Nature's forces to man, machinery, application of chemistry to industry and agriculture, steam navigation, railways, electric telegraphs, clearing of whole continents for cultivation, canalization of rivers, whole populations conjured out of the ground – what earlier century had even a presentiment that such productive forces slumbered in the lap of social labour?

However, the class which had such tremendous achievements to its credit will not rule for nearly as long as the feudal aristocracy. This is because the bourgeoisie has brought into existence a class which will quickly destroy it. How? Under capitalism everything becomes a commodity, an object of barter; the love which the wife sells to the husband as much as the labour which the proletarian sells on the market. In the long run he will never get more

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for his labour than is needed to 'reproduce' it, that is to say to keep him and his family alive. But he produces more than this wage is worth and this 'surplus' constitutes the capitalist's profit. 'Surplus value' is the source which makes capital grow. The more capital grows, the more the big independent capitalists increase their wealth, the more the small independent entrepreneurs are reduced to the level of wage earners, to the mass of those who eke out a bare existence under conditions unworthy of human beings. At the same time periodic economic crises become more frequent because the workers are not allowed to enjoy the bulk of what they produce. Misery increases the whole time and the number of those who are poor in spite of the growing wealth of society rises. The rich become fewer in number and there are more frequent and violent economic crises, unemployment and starvation. Does it then need much intelligence to foresee the inevitable end? One day soon the great army of proletarians will topple the small band of capitalists from the pinnacles of power. The great robbers who had been about to rob the whole people will themselves be dispossessed. Private ownership of the means of production, the negation of all true partnership and freedom, will be rejected. The great revolution will be a political one because the capitalists control the state through their parliaments, their legal systems, their armies, churches, schools and even - as in the France of Louis Philippe - through their kings. But the revolution will transcend politics, it will change the basic structure of society.

This will be the last revolution. For whereas all previous revolutionary classes were small minorities and therefore became *ruling* classes, the proletariat is in an overwhelming majority, it consists of almost the whole people, or at any rate represents the people, since it is the most progressive element. The proletariat will use power not in its own interest but for the benefit of all; it will not exploit anybody. However, one must reckon with a period of resistance from those who have been overthrown and dispossessed; and while this period lasts there will have to be an 'iron dictatorship' of the proletariat. Obviously a strong hand is needed to keep down the former privileged classes, to exercise revolutionary justice and to establish the new social forms. But once this has

been done not only dictatorship but the state itself, with all the means of coercion which have characterized it since the Egyptian pharaohs, will cease to be needed. What is the state but an instrument of repression whose wheels turn for the benefit of the ruling class? Once there is no more ruling class, no exploiters or exploited, the state itself must obviously disappear. Men will pursue their occupations in free partnership, unobstructed by kings, soldiers and priests, by dispute and fear and religious superstition. Science, thoughtfully applied, will take man to undreamt-of heights of comfort and happiness. All contradictions are resolved. What Hegel had accomplished only in philosophical terms, the reconciliation between consciousness and reality, is at last achieved. All is well with the world and man is himself.

The Communists are the vanguard of the proletariat, just as the proletariat is the vanguard of mankind. They are that part of the proletariat which has become conscious of itself and it is through consciousness alone that the goal can be achieved; in fact, class consciousness and revolution are one and the same thing. It is the task of the Communists to prepare the revolution scientifically. They must demolish all other socialist theories and schools with their criticism, because there is only *one* true, scientific socialism, namely their own. On the other hand they will form alliances with *any* revolutionary group – even with the bourgeoisie; this will happen in places like Germany where the bourgeois revolution is not yet complete. Capitalists and proletarians are allies against feudalism. Then, however, the bourgeois revolution will be mercilessly continued until it becomes the proletarian revolution, either immediately or after a short period of naked, shameless capitalist rule no longer disguised by monarchical or feudal forms. In any case this will not last long. ‘Let the capitalists know beforehand that they work only in our interest,’ wrote Engels in January 1848 in the Brussels German-language newspaper.

In Germany they will soon have to ask for our help. Go on fighting valiantly, milords of capital! For the moment we need you; in places we even need your rule. You must do away with the remains of the Middle Ages and absolute monarchy for us, you must destroy patriarchy, you must centralize, you must transform all more or less

propertyless classes into real proletarians, into recruits for us; through your factories and trade you must provide us with the basis of the material means which the proletariat needs for its liberation and as a reward you may rule for a short time . . . but do not forget: the hangman stands outside the door.

Thus runs the reasoning of the *Manifesto*. Is one to call it brilliant or marvel at the enormous presumptuousness served by so much skill? The most astonishing fact about the intellectual adventure of these two arrogant young men was its lasting, world-wide effect. The spirit of the *Communist Manifesto* never really came to life in the German social democratic movement. It came to life in the Communist parties of Russia and Asia and is alive there today. Two elements have come down from the *Manifesto* to our day with evil results: the certainty of possessing the key to the future, the complete certainty of being right while everybody else is wrong; and the readiness to make alliances with other groups – with those who are wrong – but only to use them, to cheat them and to destroy them as quickly as possible. ‘We willingly support other left-wing parties,’ Lenin wrote, ‘but as the rope supports the hanged man.’ It was Marx and Engels who brought this curse of falsity into the world.

They saw many things. Some of their statements were confirmed by the next hundred years and some very strikingly by the next six months. The class struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat was indeed a key to the understanding of contemporary events, particularly in France, which they regarded as the model for Europe’s history as a whole. Others too saw this. The idea was in the air and became a terrible reality in June 1848, all the more rapidly because it was in the air. Other historical thinkers too succumbed to the temptation of applying the experiences of their age to the past as a whole and then believed that they had discovered the law governing history.

We know, however, that history did not take the course Marx prophesied and it would be useless to disprove his work by enumerating all the things which came about in spite of his predictions. Every prophet is refuted by the future. Marx was proved right more often than almost anyone else who has tried his hand

at this dubious pastime. The most successful paragraph in the *Manifesto* is probably the one describing the achievements of capitalism, because what it describes hardly existed in 1848 and only came to maturity about 1900. Marx foresaw the whole significance of a capitalist world economy, and this vision alone would be enough to make him a memorable figure. But it is neither his insight nor his errors in judging the situation which need arouse passion today; they are over and done with. What were the basic errors which distorted his ideas and his political programme?

Marx despised politics and therefore failed to appreciate the opportunities it offered to mitigate the class struggle and the chances for the proletariat to improve its conditions by political action. The fact that later, in writing *Das Kapital*, he needed to rely so heavily on the reports of British factory inspectors – as Engels had done for his *Condition of the Working Classes* – should have been a warning to him. Though paid by the ‘bourgeois’, ‘capitalist’ state to discover the truth about the living conditions of the workers, these inspectors reported with merciless objectivity. Political action had been responsible for this attitude and it was conceivable that much more could be achieved in the social sphere by political pressure. There was certainly a connection between politics and the economic struggle, but the two were not identical and could be separated, a fact which Marx ignored. He not only despised politics but also the philosophy or science of politics and regarded the theory of the limitation of power or division of authority, of the constitutional state, and everything that had been thought about it and done for it for centuries, as mumbo-jumbo. He was interested only in the class which had economic power; the rest were ideological fantasies hatched in the interest of the rulers to support and disguise their position. Therefore the works of Marx and Engels contain no word on how the power of the Communist state might be limited or how it should be exercised. To them the question seemed absurd; political power, even if dressed up in legal garb, was economic exploitation, and where the one did not exist the other could not exist either. This serious error, the simple equation of politics with

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the 'economic basis', with property relations, also lingers on. Even today Communists will tell us that a state in which the means of production are not in private hands, is a Communist state, that it can never be imperialist, can never be despotic in domestic matters, can never exploit workers and peasants, and so on.

Marx thought little about the economic standards and rules which victorious Communism would one day devise for itself. The 'expropriation of the expropriators', the common ownership of the means of production, the liberation and scientific direction of the productive forces - that was enough for him. For years he thought intensively about the way to the goal, about the decline of the capitalist class, the struggle, the technique of the revolution. About the goal itself he did not think at all, so that after the final victory his greatest pupil, Lenin, found himself in some embarrassment; only then did people begin to consider what Communism should look like. The argument about what is true Socialism or Communism in practice has continued ever since. There was nothing on the subject in the works of the master.

In politics man reveals himself as he is, with his good and bad potentialities, with his suspicions, fear and hatred, egoism and altruism, rivalry in games, delight in lending a helping hand, lust for power, desire for security, cruelty, idealism and base passions. Marx despised politics because he reduced the human problem to a purely natural one and denied its moral side. Once the economy was settled the rest *must* sort itself out. And he dismissed as priestly talk the argument that it was man with all the failings of the flesh and the soul who must settle his economy and that he would remain even after achieving economic liberation. He could be shocked by the hard-hearted greed of the English capitalists, with good reason; systematically, however, there was no place in his philosophy for the difference between good and evil. Man acted as he must; if economic conditions changed he would undoubtedly act differently. This optimism, which Marx inherited from the Enlightenment, still permeates modern social science in the West. It regards the problem of man merely as a concrete problem which can be solved scientifically, not as a moral one which must for ever remain in the balance. To put it more simply,

it overlooks the fact that those who must solve human problems are also human beings, and that there is no relying on human beings.

Another aspect of the same attitude is Marx's denial of all religion. Philosophically he regarded it as an expression of human 'self-alienation', and practically as the venal servant of the ruling system. Can one deny that there was some truth in this? The disgracefully run-down papal state, defended by Austrian soldiers and Rothschild money, the English High Church which sided with the Tories and which saw in the most modest parliamentary reforms the end of the world, the Christian Teutonic pomposity of the kings of Prussia or Bavaria, the almost universal alliance between 'throne and altar' – such things could well lead the revolutionary to hostility against all organized religion. There was a great preacher in New York who thundered from his pulpit that the worker who could not keep his family on a dollar a day did not deserve to live. This man of God was himself pocketing thousands of dollars a month and as he preached loose precious stones rattled in his pocket. He was not untypical in America. As we are speaking about Marx's basic mistakes, however, the present writer must declare himself and remind his reader of the difference between the organization and its aim or highest objective. In everything man creates there is the human element, in the organization of the church as much as in any other. Maybe, as the Romans said, corruption of the best is the worst. But the corruption of the churches proves nothing against their mission. On the contrary, the one awareness that all Christian religions have in common is that man cannot be relied upon, that he stands in need of grace. Edmund Burke, the founder of modern conservatism, was not an incorruptible politician but his views are no less true for that. It was he who wrote:

We know, and what is better, we feel inwardly, that religion is the basis of civil society, and the source of all good and of all comfort. In England we are so convinced of this, that there is no rust of superstition, with which the accumulated absurdity of the human mind might have crusted it over in the course of ages, that ninety-nine in a hundred of the people of England would not prefer to impiety . . . We know, and it is

our pride to know, that man is by his constitution a religious animal; that atheism is against, not only our reason, but our instincts; and that it cannot prevail long. But if . . . we should uncover our nakedness, by throwing off that Christian religion which has hitherto been our boast and comfort, and one great source of civilisation amongst us, and among many other nations, we are apprehensive (being well aware that the mind will not endure a void) that some uncouth, pernicious, and degrading superstition might take the place of it.

Marx, on the other hand, called religion 'the opium of the people' and proposed to free us from it for ever. The present writer is convinced that Burke did more justice to the human situation – and was therefore closer to the truth – than Marx.

The *Communist Manifesto* was completed in the first days of 1848. Three months later its authors rushed to Germany, where they believed the moment had come to translate their ideas into actions.

Part Four

1848

1. THE STORY

'One morning towards the end of February 1848', the American politician Carl Schurz recalls from the days of his youth in Germany, 'I was sitting quietly in my attic working away on Ulrich von Hutten when one of my friends burst in and gasping for breath, shouted: "What are you sitting here for? Haven't you heard the news?" "What?" "The French have thrown out Louis Philippe and proclaimed a republic." I dropped my pen - and Ulrich von Hutten has not been touched since. We leapt down the stairs, into the street. Where should we go now . . .?' So powerful an effect did the news of the February revolution in Paris have on young Germans.

The European revolt against the established order which with diminishing faith in itself had existed for thirty-three years, began in January in Sicily and southern Italy. In February it spread to France, scarcely surprising those who had long watched the citizen-King's corrupt, unpopular regime follow its lonely downhill path. Germany, too, was ripe for a great event. It had long been the fashion among serious people to expect it, to hope for it and to fear it. What one expects usually happens because, consciously or not, one acts according to the expectation. Liberal election victories in southern Germany showed from which direction the wind was blowing. The problem of the Prussian constitution demanded a solution. In Austria Chancellor Metternich could not survive for ever; even the most dynastically faithful patriots admitted that his 'system' had become an anachronism. In Germany as a whole, particularly in the West and the

South, the demand for a reorganization of the Confederation, for a German Reich, became increasingly insistent. Then there was the Socialist or Communist movement, intangible, numerically small but much talked about and feared; Prince William of Prussia pronounced a warning against 'Liberal and Communist influence' even in the Prussian army. The year 1847 had brought one of those periodically recurring trade crises of whose nature little was known and whose consequences were combated with wholly inadequate palliatives. Something would therefore have happened, if not that year, then a little later. But as Germany was part of Europe the stimulus provided by the Latin countries started things moving in Germany and they moved easily.

1. The March Revolution

In the first weeks of March a flood of meetings and demonstrations organized by the middle class, supported by peasants, artisans and workers, swept the leaders of the liberal opposition into power in Baden, Württemberg, Bavaria, Darmstadt, Nassau, Kassel, Saxony and Hanover. The same demands were made everywhere, varying in degree according to the nature of the existing mismanagement; they were granted everywhere with the same readiness, as though the rulers had long been secretly convinced that they must change their habits. Everything was granted, freedom of the press and of assembly, arms for the people or the National Guard, trial by jury, reform of the franchise where there was one, and participation in the establishment of a German federal state. South German parliamentarians meeting in Heidelberg even decided to convene on their own initiative a German National Assembly in Frankfurt-am-Main, 'in order to protect the whole German fatherland and its rulers', as their proclamation said. The rulers too were to be protected because nobody wished to emulate the French example. No one was to be hurt by the 'March experience', as it was later called. Jubilation

fraternization, reconciliation with contrite princes, flags, torches and triumphal arches – that was the mood. There was to be no terrible collapse as in France in 1792, no new beginning of German history. Force was if possible not to be used, only persuasion, strengthened by a little revolutionary attitudinizing.

But what happened in Stuttgart or Darmstadt could not decide the fate of the nation. Although the 'third Germany' as a whole carried some weight, the first and the second, Austria and Prussia, carried more.

On 13 March Metternich retired from office and slipped away to Britain, still talking, still philosophizing. Although in its unanimity the movement which brought about this departure at first seemed to resemble those of southern and western Germany, it drew its nourishment from stronger sources. Vienna had four hundred thousand inhabitants, among them a class-conscious, intelligent industrial working class, politically informed, well-led students, as well as a variety of organizations, trade and cultural associations, and a great many foreigners from the provinces of the Habsburg Empire, Poles, Czechs, Hungarians and Italians. In Austria too 'everything was granted' hastily, first the dismissal of the Chancellor, then the magic thing which in those days was credited with almost unlimited remedial power, a 'constitution'. What was not clear was what form it should take in order to give equal satisfaction to the many peoples of the Empire. Vienna was Austrian, very loyal to the Emperor as well as very German, and wanted an *Anschluss* – the word came into use then – to a greater Germany. Milan and Venice were in revolt, and nothing less than complete separation from Austria could satisfy the democratic nationalism of the Italians. A south Slav, 'Illyrian' or Croat movement threatened the predominance of the Magyar aristocracy within the kingdom of Hungary. In Prague Czech spokesmen staked their claims, directed less against the Empire than against its predominantly German character, having calculated that there were more Slavs than Germans in the Habsburg Empire. What form could be found to contain all these elements? In the spring and early summer months of 1848, when the

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Austrian monarchy lurched like a rudderless ship, there were many who prophesied the downfall of this once glorious but antiquated state.

Neither before nor after Metternich's fall was Austria capable of using the revolutionary development in Germany for its own ends or to give it direction. The kingdom of Prussia was in a better position as late as the first weeks of March. If there was to be sudden change there must be leadership, either from a strong revolutionary organization - which did not exist - or from one of the major German states and its rulers. What Paris was for France only Vienna or Berlin could be for Germany. It is true that later, in the autumn, one man attempted to proclaim a German republic in Lörrach, opposite Basle, in the furthest corner of southern Baden; but Lörrach was no place for such a venture. What mattered were the great cities and the Great Powers. But the liberal movement was not nearly strong enough or ruthless enough to grapple successfully with the Great Powers. It waited, it pleaded for leadership. A delegation of liberals from the small states went to Berlin to convince King Frederick William IV of the opportunity awaiting his ambition. This psychopathic autocrat, paralysed by all kinds of untimely reveries, was, however, not the man to seize the opportunity.

He was eager to perform a great historic deed, provided it could be done exactly as he wanted, leaving the pomp of kingship intact and avoiding danger - requirements that were difficult to fulfil. His first concession in Prussia, the periodic convening of the United Diet, was no longer enough. Prussia was part of Germany as Germany was part of Europe; Prussia also wanted to have its 'March experience'. There was much talk of the all-powerful 'spirit of the age'; disturbances in the big provincial cities, Cologne, Breslau, Königsberg and later in Berlin, made this spirit triumphant also in Prussia. These disturbances were harmless enough, but seemed more serious because the army behaved as was its old, grim custom. Tension grew and Frederick William let himself be persuaded that it was high time to give way to the spirit of the age. Only five days after Metternich's fall 'everything was granted' in Prussia too - freedom of the press

and a liberal constitution for the whole of Germany as well as for Prussia. This ought really to have meant the end of the 'March experience'. However, there was serious street fighting in Berlin between the people and the army. Perhaps sound political sense came to the help of the aggressive instinct, the panic or the misunderstanding of some unit. Or perhaps the Berliners wanted to show for once that they and not the army were the masters of their city. They demanded the withdrawal of the soldiers. After several hundred people had been shot dead His Majesty granted this demand too. The regiments were withdrawn from the city and a hastily organized National Guard kept order in their place. This was a victory for the liberal spirit, particularly in the capital of this state which from its beginning had belonged to the army. The triumph was confirmed by the hasty flight of Prince William, the King's brother, who had the reputation of being an arch-militarist and agitator, a 'Russian', and by the obeisance which the King was forced to make to the bodies of the victims brought into the castle courtyard - 'only the guillotine is missing now', the Queen remarked on this sombre occasion; it was further confirmed by the curious procession on horseback which Frederick William made through the city on 21 March, wearing a sash of black, red and gold (the revolutionary colours of national Germany), to announce that he was placing himself at the head of Germany. The bewildered monarch was followed by members of the National Guard, celebrated fighters of the preceding days, behind whom came the 'people' enthusiastically sweeping the state dignitaries along with them. 'Just as well your brother made peace', said a workman to one of the royal princes, 'let me tell you, otherwise things might have become sticky, very sticky. We were all for a republic if the shooting hadn't stopped. All is well though, and we think that everyone will keep their word, then we won't give any trouble.' That was the question, would everyone keep his word?

Spokesmen for the liberal opposition, two businessmen from the Rhineland, Ludolf Camphausen and David Hansemann, were summoned to lead the government. The United Diet, meeting for the last time, acknowledged only one final duty: to

sanction the latest developments and to adopt legislation providing for an election of 'the assembly to be convened in order to draw up the Prussian constitution'. In principle the franchise was democratic and it needed only the implementation of such royal concessions as freedom of the press, trial by jury, an independent judiciary, the establishment of a national guard and the repeal of feudal legislation, to make Prussia a modern, middle-class state.

In fact nothing was decided. And the situation was so confused that even a century later it is difficult to see how it could have been unravelled.

2. Unsolved Problems

The old powers, the Courts, armies and bureaucracies, had not been defeated. Without serious struggle there could be no serious victory. There had been no serious contest of strength in March, either in Vienna or in Berlin. The 'March achievements' were the result of a momentary loss of nerve on the part of the rulers, not their decisive defeat. Furthermore, the victors themselves did not want a real victory; they did not want a revolution in the French sense. The words 'everything is granted' heard so often with joy in Germany at the time, show that people wanted freedom to be granted by the traditional authority. Reform, compromise, 'agreement' were the German liberals' favourite terms; only a few radical democrats raised the question of what should happen if the two partners, 'crown' and 'people', failed to agree. After Louis Philippe's fall someone said to a famous Westphalian liberal that the same might happen in Germany. He replied: 'Revolution in Prussia? It's absolutely out of the question. In Prussia we want peaceful, national reform and a liberal constitution, but in no circumstances revolution.' Similarly the Hessian Minister, von Gagern, who later became President of the German National Assembly, and who, with his virtues and his

weaknesses, was a typical representative of the whole movement, said:

You must proclaim the intention of this Assembly so that it echoes through Germany . . . our intention of preserving the monarchy, of establishing an Assembly that wants freedom and strives for it in the interest of the people and of popular sovereignty, while remaining faithful to the principle of monarchy in the state and advocating the need for unification.

Popular sovereignty but monarchy; and, let it be noted, not the type of monarchy that Britain has today, monarchy that was crushed to rise again as a friendly, beloved symbol of national unity, but monarchy as it existed in Germany, tenacious, selfish and closely connected with powerful social forces. The German liberals wanted a thorough political change, but without the rough means employed for the purpose by other countries, because above all they hated lawlessness. Such a trusting game could only succeed if all the partners kept to the rules. There were no changes in the army and the administration. New, inexperienced ministers were put in charge of hostile staff who regretted the good old days. In March the princes – with exceptions – were probably honest about their concessions. Even one of the most conservative and a relatively intelligent one, Prince William of Prussia, believed for some weeks that the spirit of the age had defeated him and that he must accept the new situation. Men rarely have enough consistent malice to do one thing while planning something else. When the rulers noticed that the spirit of the age was not so dangerous after all and they they need not have given way, they began to listen to their reactionary advisers.

The liberals wanted peaceful reform and legal continuity, by which they set great store. They did not want to appoint themselves but to be entrusted with restricted powers by the former rulers. There was an immediate break-away by a group which did not regard such a preservation of the old legality as either possible or desirable. They were variously called democrats, republicans or social republicans. In Berlin, in Vienna, later in Frankfurt, in western and south-western Germany, everywhere,

they were soon completely opposed to the liberals. A movement to the left, the emergence of a new, radical opposition by the side of the old one in power, is normal in times of revolution. It happened in France in the eighteenth century and in England in the seventeenth. In France, however, where politics were taken with passionate seriousness, one of the parties was eliminated before the remaining majority split; when Girondists and Jacobins faced one another the supporters of the monarchy were no longer a political power. In Germany the defenders of the old order still existed. The right gained the support of the liberal centre as the left became more radical. The liberals wanted constitutional monarchy, but rather than let themselves be overpowered by the democrats they surrendered to the Prince of Prussia. Radicalism therefore weakened the revolution; it could only have had the reverse effect if it had been very strong and ruthless.

In addition to the new division of the nation into parties there was the old division into states which were much healthier than was thought at the time. The fact that in March something common to all Germany had emerged, the roots of which went back a long way, did not yet mean the end of particularism. In 1848 Europe demonstrated that it was a whole in which one piece was part of the rest: there was revolution simultaneously in Paris and in Budapest, in Palermo and in Posen. This solidarity did not, however, put an end to the nations or their clamorous urge for self-realization; quite the contrary. Neither did Germany cease to be divided into states because the same liberal movement had momentarily been successful everywhere. While we associate the existence of these states with certain classes and their interests, with princes, landowners, officers, civil servants, court purveyors and so on, it would be a mistake to attribute their existence only to material interests. States have an idea of themselves which is handed down from generation to generation and has its roots deep in the past. We are sentimental creatures, proud of the community to which we belong. Austria, Prussia, Bavaria and even Württemberg, Hanover and Hamburg all had distinct notions of what the state should be. A loyal citizen of

one of these states – which meant all but a few completely independent, highly intelligent and rootless individuals – who wanted German unity wanted something difficult to combine with his loyalties. In certain regions, for example in Old Bavaria – the name given to the districts that had been part of Bavaria before Napoleon – loyalty to the state was clearly stronger than the enthusiasm for a united Germany.

Not only was Germany divided politically, it was also linked by some highly complicated relationships to non-German states and peoples. The German Confederation included German, semi-German or allegedly German states which also owed allegiance to other rulers: Dutch Luxembourg and Limburg, Danish Holstein, and of the Habsburg territories, in addition to the German-Austrian regions, the Italian Trentino and the predominantly Czech kingdom of Bohemia. On the other hand there were regions ruled by a German state and inhabited at least partly by Germans – the Prussian provinces of East and West Prussia and Posen (Poznań) – that did not belong to the German Confederation. If there was to be an empire of *all* Germans – and that was the ambition – there were patriots who recalled the existence of many Germans on foreign soil: in French Alsace, in Danish Holstein, in the Baltic provinces of Russia and in the cities of the Habsburg Empire, down the Danube almost to the Black Sea. The modern, somewhat crude method of ‘population exchange’ or ‘resettlement’ was unknown in the nineteenth century. A German empire or national state could therefore only come into being if it included a great many non-Germans, or excluded a great many Germans, or if it chose a difficult middle road between these two extremes.

Finally, the emergence of a new national state in the heart of Europe was an international question of concern to all the European powers. Britain, France and Russia could be in favour or against, but they could not be indifferent to the question whether such a state should be established, what form it should take and what its frontiers should be. The Great Powers were concerned with every major change in the balance of power; they were particularly concerned in this instance because, as we

have seen, the German question had always been considered a European one and the constitution of the German Confederation of 1815 had even been written into the Final Act of the Congress of Vienna.

Popular sovereignty versus historic or monarchical law, social democracy versus liberalism, dynastic states versus the Confederation, national state versus foreign nationalities, great powers versus the new Great Power – none of these problems was really thought through or fought through to the end in 1848 and 1849. In chaotic interplay they dominated, confused and wrecked the great attempt.

3. Confusion Worse Confounded

From a legal point of view the assembly of German politicians which met in Frankfurt at the end of March to prepare the convocation of a national parliament was revolutionary because it had not been invited by any of the existing authorities. Yet even this 'pre-parliament' established close relations with the Federal Diet, and the Federal Diet – still the only legal representative of the Confederation – hastened to follow its suggestions. The Federal Diet explicitly agreed to elections for a parliament which was to draw up a constitution for the whole of Germany; legal continuity seemed thus to be preserved or restored. Those who wanted to transform the pre-parliament into a revolutionary government in the French style, into a 'Convention', who were anxious to forge a programme of definite social reform while the iron of democracy was hot, controlled barely a tenth of the assembly. The general idea was that henceforth the majority would rule peacefully with the blessing of the old authority; the old privileged minority must not be replaced by a new revolutionary one. After a few stormy meetings the pre-parliament dissolved itself. A committee of fifty of its members remained behind in order to keep an eye on the old Federal Diet until the

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true National Assembly began its work. Elections were fixed for 1 May.

The unexpected, not provided for in the liberal textbook, began even as the Committee of Fifty performed its legally obscure but important duties.

A radical republican from Baden, Friedrich Hecker, a tough, red-bearded brigand who attracted the young, decided that nothing could be done in Frankfurt and that he must act on his own. After proclaiming a republic in Constance he and his volunteers moved northwards, hoping to win over the masses. At the same time a 'German Legion' was forming in France, composed of itinerant craftsmen, men of private means and *litterati* under the leadership of the poet Georg Herwegh, a few hundred in all. These were senseless, melodramatic ventures which the committee in Frankfurt could not tolerate but which it was impotent to deal with because it lacked physical means of coercion. The result was unpleasant: the rift between liberals and radicals widened, the gathering in Frankfurt admitted the need for action against the left, and the activities of the radical writers came to be looked upon as both dangerous and ridiculous.

In addition to the anxiety caused by radical activities there was another, confusing one: the problem of the foreign nationalities.

In order to make the Committee of Fifty more representative some Austrians had been invited to join, among them the Prague historian, Professor Palacký. The assumption was that, as of old, Bohemia was part of Germany. Palacký replied that he was Czech and not German. Let the Germans establish their republic; while he had no objections it was of no concern to him as a Czech. Moreover, he was not merely a Czech but an Austrian, and Austria was the Empire which protected the small West Slav and South Slav peoples and it must not be destroyed. On the contrary, it must remain as it was; the German Austrians belonged inseparably to the great family of the Danube Empire. 'Indeed, if the Austrian Empire did not exist already one ought to hasten, in the interest of Europe, in the interest of humanity itself, to create it . . .' Palacký's letter which struck the men in Frankfurt as strange is a noteworthy document. The spokesman

of Czech nationalism solemnly proclaimed that the Czechs were a different nation from the Germans and that consequently the German Empire could not be the great medieval empire which included Bohemia, but at best something much more limited. Furthermore, Palacký expressed himself against the union of German-speaking Austria and the Empire. He did not want an encirclement of Bohemia by a great German empire, and while he spoke in terms of the new concept of a Czech nationality he also used the old one of an indestructible Austrian monarchy which had become an historical fact. Palacký was a politician without office or mandate and could not decide such questions, but he stirred up a wasps' nest of problems and contradictions.

Then there were the Poles, who had always been regarded as the noblest victims of absolutist territorial greed, the brotherly allies of all who strove for freedom. In March the German liberals were of the opinion that the Poles too should benefit from the revolution and at last be given back their own state, their ancient republic. But how? The great part of former Poland belonged to the Tsar and Tsar Nicholas was not to be trifled with if his authority was concerned. He would not accept the establishment of even a fragment of Polish independence on Prussian soil. The liberation of Poland could only be achieved by a war against the Tsar's well-drilled mass army. There were Germans who welcomed the idea of such a war, either because they had not thought out the possible consequences – this was true of certain liberal war enthusiasts – or because they had thought about them all too carefully and hoped that a world war would produce the true revolution. The King of Prussia, however, did not want such a war, least of all against his brother-in-law in St. Petersburg, the unbending, proud protector of all monarchy. Nor was the Russian problem the only one. The Prussian province of Posen – the so-called Grand Duchy – was inhabited by Poles and Germans, about half a million Germans and slightly more Poles, who in some areas lived completely separately and in others in close proximity. When the Prussian state granted the Poles political rights which they had not possessed hitherto they began to act as rulers of the province, estab-

lishing their own government, persecuting Germans and Jews. It is characteristic of men who have been disfranchised to take more than their share when they are liberated and to do to others what has been done to them. In the same spirit the Czech leader, Palacký, started to talk about the reconquest of Saxony, which he claimed had once been Czech or at least Slav, and where the Germans had established themselves illegally. In Prague there was only talk, but in Posen there was action, confiscation and looting. The Germans reacted and Berlin intervened. At first, still full of liberal good will, it tried to mediate and to keep the two nationalities apart in a friendly fashion. In the end it was forced into the civil war on the German side and Prussian troops suppressed the Polish rising. The Prussian general, it seems, set out to teach the Poles a lesson; the Poles, spurred on by their noblemen and their bishop, were ready to give as good as they got. The Prussian troops, who won willy-nilly, disarmed the Polish revolutionaries and restored the old system – applauded by the Germans. This was not a victory of the revolution, not even of the German revolution.

The unsolved Polish question was still causing confusion when the Danish one arose; it seemed as though Germany's neighbours conspired to make its well-meant, hopeful national effort as difficult as possible. But there was no such conspiracy. Nations clashed because the national liberal movement was a European one and because the same motives were at work in different countries. The Danes wanted their greater Denmark at the very moment when the Germans wanted their great, united Germany; hence the clash.

The Schleswig-Holstein affair was vital and simple and at the same time incredibly complicated. Since the late Middle Ages the King of Denmark had reigned over the two Duchies which, according to a very ancient treaty, were never allowed to be separated. Holstein was part of the Holy Roman Empire and, after 1815, of the German Confederation; Schleswig was not. The inhabitants of Holstein were entirely German in blood and speech, whereas in Schleswig only about three-quarters of the population were German; in northern Schleswig Low German

merged into Danish. The Danes, patriots like the Germans, wanted to give their state a more modern form and demanded the incorporation of the whole of Schleswig into Denmark. The matter was urgent for a curious legal reason. The Danish king had no sons and while in Copenhagen the crown could pass to the female issue of the royal house, in the Duchies the succession was restricted to males. Therefore, if tradition was followed, the personal union between Schleswig and Denmark would cease with the death of Frederick VII. For Denmark this was a grievous loss; for nascent Germany it was an important gain, providing an opportunity of becoming a maritime power on the north Sea and the Baltic. Long before 1848 German and Danish nationalists had turned their attention to developments in Schleswig-Holstein.

In March the Duchies were gripped by the same enthusiasm for action as the other German states; because of their special position they wanted even more, namely the admission of Schleswig into the German Confederation and its virtual independence of Copenhagen. The Danish king thought otherwise: 'We have neither the right nor the power nor the wish to make our Duchy of Schleswig part of the German Confederation; rather we desire to strengthen the indissoluble union of Schleswig and Denmark by means of a joint constitution.' The inhabitants of Schleswig rebelled, a provisional government was established in Rendsburg – how many provisional governments there were in those days – and Schleswig-Holstein appealed for help to the common German fatherland and its most powerful prince, the King of Prussia. While Danish troops moved into Schleswig Frederick William IV surrendered to the national clamour for war. His liberal government wanted to use Prussia for a great action on the part of Germany and to unite the country by means of a common war against injustice. The Committee in Frankfurt called for the formation of volunteer corps. The Danes could not hold out against the Prussian attack; the victors pushed on through Schleswig into Denmark proper, to Jutland. This was a dangerous game, however much the Germans had reason to think that they were in the right. The Danes, too, thought that

they were in the right. What anyway did right mean where interests conflicted, where two peoples were imbued with equal determination to survive? Denmark was a small country but Schleswig-Holstein was situated on the Baltic and the North Sea; the great power on the Baltic was Russia and the great power on the North Sea was Britain. An attack on Denmark must sooner or later lead to a clash with these great powers.

4. The Paulskirche

Such was the situation on 18th May when the long promised German National Assembly at last began its work in Frankfurt. The auspices were no longer as promising as they had been even two months previously; the Assembly needed to do very good work if it was to win. The revolution had been victorious without ever having won a real battle; the mass of the people – theoretically sovereign – were no longer so enthusiastic; half-disappointed, they were losing interest; the old powers were regaining their confidence and still controlled the armed forces. Triumphant liberalism was threatened from the ‘left’ by radical democracy, and therefore depended all the more on the old powers with which it wanted to reach an ‘understanding’. How a German national state would deal with non-German nations which had close ties with Germany was an unsolved but already poisoned problem; the international situation was tense, giving rise to a number of grave conjectures; there was the *possibility* of war against Russia, the *possibility* of war against France, not to mention the war actually being fought against Denmark. The liberal planners had visualized a very different picture at the beginning of March. A Prussian assembly, which met in Berlin, was elected at the same time as the German National Assembly; and a few weeks later a constituent diet gathered in Vienna. Thus there now existed three interlocking circles, the Austrian, the Prussian and the German. In theory the German was

designed to coincide with the other two because the Frankfurt Assembly decided that its legislation applied without reservation to all German states, and so also to Austria to the extent that it was, or wanted to be, German. In fact the situation was very different; it was not Vienna and Berlin that were dependent on Frankfurt, but Frankfurt on Vienna and Berlin. It was also dependent on Prague, Munich and Stuttgart, Paris, London and St Petersburg, but chiefly on Berlin and Vienna. The German National Assembly had authority, or seemed to have it, only so long as the Austrian and Prussian states were immobilized by internal strife.

The Assembly which met in the bare rotunda of the *Paulskirche* was certainly a distinguished one. There has never been a more highly educated parliament: more than a hundred professors, more than 200 learned jurists, writers, clergymen, doctors, burgomasters, civil servants, manufacturers, bankers, landowners, even a few master craftsmen and small tenant farmers – but not a single worker. There were aged men from the Napoleonic era and young men who would live to see the twentieth century, worthies from provincial towns and universally beloved and famous poets, orators, historians and politicians. Much idealism and optimism, reduced to silence in Metternich's Germany, were assembled here and allowed to raise their voice. The world was good, the German people was great and good; and their old rulers were not so bad that it was not somehow possible to come to terms with them. The exponents of these noble ideas also had a high regard for themselves and the Assembly to which they belonged. The Hessian Heinrich von Gagern, a handsome, impressive man and a great orator who favoured the middle road, was elected president. He was chosen because the Assembly wanted to follow that road, the centre being by far the most powerful group.

At the beginning there were and could be no parties, but soon they emerged: the left, the right, the centre and bridges which reached from the centre to the right and to the left. The right wanted to restrict the Assembly's work to drafting a constitution without interfering with the German governments; and it wanted

a moderate, balanced constitution, protecting as far as possible the rights of the princes, states and privileged classes. The left wanted real popular sovereignty and wanted the Assembly, as the representative of the people, not merely to talk but also to rule; it wanted laws to level out old inequalities. The extreme left demanded an indivisible republic, if it could be achieved. The left was also very nationalistic and aggressive in matters of foreign policy. 'What is impossible for forty million Germans?' The centre took some ideas from the right and some from the left and was itself split from top to bottom – the usual fate of centre parties. The parties treated each other with respect, their representatives spoke well, and apart from conventional views expressed distinctly personal, divergent opinions. There were real debates in the *Paulskirche*, verbal victories and defeats.

The decision to form a national government, a 'provisional central authority', before founding the German Empire, was a victory for the left. There were prolonged public and private discussions to determine the method of appointment and the composition of this authority. The right wanted a directory of princes, the left a plenary committee of the Assembly itself, pure parliamentary rule. The result was a compromise; the central authority was set up by the Assembly which elected the 'imperial regent', but the man whom it chose was a prince, a Habsburg Archduke John of Austria. Gagern and his friends were pursuing a cunning policy. They argued that the old powers would accept a prince from a famous house; that an Austrian could offer as dowry his Austria, at any rate the German part, which had proved a difficult, self-willed partner. The prince was elected by the Assembly and the individual states were not asked for permission, a move calculated to please the left. Moreover the prince was popular, had long been an enemy of Metternich's, and was a so-called liberal, who had married a postmaster's daughter whose children he wanted to see securely established. Nonetheless the choice was not a happy one. By choosing a Habsburg as ruler the German National Assembly tied itself for better or worse to Austria; henceforth Austrians controlled the unstable levers of the power which was in Frankfurt's gift, and which they would in

the last resort always use in Austria's interest. John was no longer in his first youth; he had held command in the wars against the French Revolution and had lost a battle in 1800. Since then the old gentleman had learnt to hit exactly the right note of the new age and was good at playing the plain man. He will not appear many more times in our narrative because he played a false, but weak, game and accomplished nothing. Archduke John formed a cabinet which was to be responsible to the Assembly. Ministries were established, a chancellery, a ministry of justice, of foreign affairs, of war and of the navy. There were sensational dismissals of ministers, there were ministerial councillors, imperial ambassadors and imperial gazettes. But the minister of war had no army, the minister of justice no courts of law, the ambassadors were recognized only by a few small states – very warmly in Washington – and were received with the utmost caution in Paris and London; none of them dared to venture to St Petersburg. For the time being Archduke John presided over an empire in the clouds; whether it could ever become anything more solid depended on developments over which the men in Frankfurt had almost no influence.

5. *Setbacks*

Neither Vienna nor Berlin had calmed down since the spring; in both capitals there was a succession of congresses, demonstrations and shooting incidents. In Vienna things went so far that the Emperor, the feeble-minded Ferdinand I, once fled, or was abducted by his protectors, to Innsbruck. The growing disorder in Vienna was of no help to the German liberals. It isolated the rebellious city in the midst of the conservative Austrian countryside and helped to compromise the liberal idea among the friends of order. The Prussian assembly did good work. It was younger and more radical than the National Assembly, but again this did not help the German national venture, because those

Prussians who were serious about their own new state could not be equally serious about the German Reich. There grew up something like competition between the parliaments and their methods – a thought which may well have occurred to the conveners of the Prussian assembly.

In June the European, and therefore also the German, revolution experienced its first major setbacks. A 'Pan-Slav Congress' had been established in Prague, consisting of Czechs, Austrian South Slavs and Poles. Designed to be a rival to the German National Assembly it stressed the Slav character of the Habsburg Empire and agitated for federalism within Austria. In principle this development appealed to the conservative Austrians who did not want union with Germany; because it was directed against pro-German, red Vienna. In the last resort these Austrians were prepared to work with the 'Austro-Slavs'. But the Pan-Slav Congress degenerated into a somewhat aimless rising of the Czechs, with barricades, calls for arms for the people and all the familiar demands. The city commandant, Prince Windisch-Graetz, an out-and-out aristocrat, an out-and-out soldier, a loyal Austrian imperialist even when there was practically no Emperor and no Austria, knew what he was doing. He withdrew his troops across the Moldau, began to shell the centre of the city and so forced the Czech population to a quick surrender. The Pan-Slav Congress scattered and the imperial Austrian order was restored, proving that the old weapons were still effective, if anyone dared to use them.

The Germans were not dissatisfied with the ignominious result of the Czech and Pan-Slav movement, unmindful of the threat that the means which had been used against the Czechs could equally be turned against them. A few weeks later another Austrian general, Radetzky, marched into Milan, which had been forced back into obedience. The Austrian colossus, which in April seemed to be disintegrating, began in the summer visibly to regain its old shape. It was possible to play off one nation against another, Germans against Italians, Slavs against Magyars and Germans; and the imperial Austrian tradition was tougher than the democrats believed. Anyway, the German liberals had

from the start refused to recognize as their allies the Lombards who were fighting for national independence. That was Austria's affair and could be of no concern to Germany.

After Prague came Paris, where the situation was grimmer and gloomier than in Germany. Here Karl Marx was proved more or less right; the class struggle between the 'bourgeoisie' and the 'proletariat' moved more and more into the centre of events. The alliance between the bourgeoisie and the urban proletariat began to fall apart as soon as the common enemy, the old King, had disappeared. When the 'national workshops', big state enterprises for the unemployed, were closed, the long expected explosion took place. There was street fighting, the like of which modern Europe had not seen before, and the red fortress fell. General Cavaignac, dictator of the party of order, employed a new outflanking strategy which broke the barricades and ended this kind of civil war. Neither side showed any mercy and in three days more people were killed than in the whole of the German revolution. The result was the total, prolonged defeat of socialism in the country where it had been most strongly developed, and, momentarily, the dictatorship of the victor, Cavaignac. Lying in wait behind and against him there was already a more fortunate aspirant to power whose electoral slogan was shortly to decorate the walls: *Si vous voulez un bon – Prenez Napoléon!* Once again Germany was not dissatisfied with the outcome of the slaughter. A member of the Prussian assembly said that 'one of the most fortunate happenings in all Europe' was the way in which the problem of the Red Danger had been 'so brilliantly buried in France'. There were various ways of looking at the question. The fact was that the European revolution had begun in France and that there it had now visibly passed its zenith.

6. *Schleswig-Holstein*

Germany did not have to wait long for the crisis. The venture which had seemed so promising for the unification and expansion of the Empire, the war over Schleswig-Holstein, had proved a dangerous burden. Not from a military point of view, since on land the Germans were obviously superior to the Danes, but because there were still great powers and the peninsula was an object of European interest. Although, as we have seen, there were certain Germans, irresponsible liberals as well as communists bloodthirsty for philosophical reasons, who wanted war against Russia, the Prussian cabinet decided as early as April that such a war was not feasible. The Tsar on the other hand was ready for a show-down and this fact alone would have been enough to decide the nordic complications in Denmark's favour. In addition Britain, while adopting a more liberal, objective and conciliatory attitude than Russia, pressed for an amicable settlement of the conflict. However complicated the legal issue, there was no doubt that Prussia-Germany in a moment of enthusiasm had attacked a weaker neighbour and had itself broken the law by allowing representatives from Schleswig to take their seats in the Prussian assembly. Moreover, legal and moral issues apart, it was politically not very desirable that the 'Dardanelles of the North' should fall under the control of what looked like becoming a Great Power on land and sea. France also subscribed to this view, and Prussia gave way to pressure from the three Great Powers. After prolonged negotiations, interrupted and renewed, Prussia in August concluded the armistice of Malmö; this left the final settlement of the issue to a future peace treaty but stipulated the military evacuation of the Duchies as well as the repudiation of everything that had happened there since March in sympathy with the German revolution. Prussia had gone to war together with other German troops, at the behest of the nascent German state. The armistice it concluded alone, without asking the representatives of the central authority for their views, in fact without first notifying Frankfurt.

Emotions ran high in the *Paulskirche*. The King of Prussia had insulted the National Assembly, had let himself be frightened by a diplomatic conspiracy, had betrayed the honour of Germany. If the Assembly allowed this to happen, if it abandoned the most German of all German provinces to the Danes, it might as well close the temple of German unity. This must not happen. 'Let France,' exclaimed a member of the extreme left, 'let England, let Russia dare to interfere in our just cause. We shall reply with one and a half million armed men.' But they would not dare, and why not? 'Because they are intelligent, because they know that an unjust attack on Germany would produce a German national rising the like of which history has probably never seen.' Karl Marx, observing the situation with frightening intelligence from the editorial offices of his *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, commented:

Let the bourgeois and the Junkers in Frankfurt have no illusions: if they decide to reject the armistice they decide their own downfall, as the Girondists of the first revolution who were active on 10 August and who voted for the death of the ex-king thereby prepared ... their downfall. If on the other hand they accept the armistice they also decide their own downfall, place themselves under Prussia's sway and will have no further say in anything. Let them choose.

To present the matter in the form of these alternatives was hardly helpful. Marx thought that a people's war fought against Prussia's wish would quickly lead to the real revolution and sweep away the German middle classes, the liberals and the moderates. As, however, the armies of Prussia, Bavaria and now also of Austria were intact such a people's war lay beyond the realm of the possible. Anger unsupported by power can achieve nothing. The National Assembly did not really face the unpleasant choice between right and left which Marx thought that it must make. It had no power and could not mobilize any. The comparison with the great French Revolution did not apply: the Germans in 1848 were not what the French had been in 1793.

So the National Assembly came down first on the left and then on the right. On 4 September it decided by a narrow majority that the armistice of Malmö was invalid; this was a victory for

the left. As the decision could only be justified with thundering speeches but not implemented, the Assembly decided a week later, by almost the same majority, that the armistice was nevertheless valid. What followed, while not yet the Marxist revolution, was nevertheless a furious popular uprising in Frankfurt and the Hessian vicinity. Its causes are difficult to describe. Was 'Germany's honour' as dear as all that to the rebels? Did they dimly feel that the National Assembly, though elected by the people, did not really represent them and that they, the ordinary people, would once again go away empty handed? Was there also some sheer pleasure in excitement and bloodshed, were there agitators at work, mad *litterati* aping the French Revolution? It is impossible to answer any of these questions absolutely in the negative. When a member of the extreme left said that the new disturbances in Frankfurt, in the Rhineland and in Baden were spasms of an abortive revolution he probably hit the nail on the head; it was a revolution that was insufficiently strong to realize itself completely and therefore squandered itself in a number of ugly riots. Barricades were erected even in Frankfurt, the offices of some *Paulskirche* parties were destroyed, the Assembly itself was threatened, two conservative members were murdered in gruesome circumstances, while others – like the aged *Turnvater* Jahn who no longer understood what was happening – just managed to escape a similar fate. What could the unfortunate 'German government' do in these circumstances? Should it wage a people's war against Denmark, Russia and France in league with those who had just beaten the deputy Prince Lichnowsky to death with umbrellas? It sought protection from those who could give it, from the Prussian army garrisoned in the federal fortress of Mainz. Royal Prussian troops, instead of fighting the Danes, restored order in German Frankfurt.

It was the most curious situation imaginable in a revolutionary battle [noted the writer Heinrich Laube, who was present]. The insurgents fought against authorities who had only just emerged from the nation's universal suffrage. The attacked defended themselves with troops whose commanders had only recently been the adversaries of those who were now attacked – and would probably soon be again.

The troubles in Frankfurt revealed the full extent of the impotence of the National Assembly; impotence rather than weakness of character or lack of ability. The empire of the liberals was an illusion and could not decide real issues like war and peace. As long as Prussia and Austria were genuine states Germany was no state. Prussia had basically never ceased to be one; it was probable by early summer and certain by late autumn that the end of the Habsburg Empire had been proclaimed too soon.

7. Vienna and Berlin

In Austria the political fate of the Germans was inextricably involved with that of the other peoples of central and south-east Europe: Slavs, Rumanians and Magyars. In March Hungary had been given the rights of a self-governing state. If German and Polish nationalism were on less good terms with each other than the liberals had hoped, the situation was even worse in the old Kingdom where the traditionally ruling Magyars were in conflict with the 'subject nations' – the Rumanians, Slovaks, Slovenes and Croats. In western Europe Kossuth, the leader of the new Hungary, was regarded as a good liberal, in America even as a democrat. In reality this charismatic, conceited revolutionary was the most extreme nationalist who had hitherto appeared. He gave the non-Magyar peoples of Hungary the choice between complete submission or extermination. They chose to fight. The Hungarian spring of freedom thus quickly degenerated into a murderous war against the Magyars by the Croats and the Slovenes under the leadership of their Viceroy, Baron Jellačić. The supporters of imperial Austria welcomed this development because the war in Hungary offered an opportunity of ending Magyar separatism. All those who for one reason or another wanted to see the Habsburg monarchy preserved were against the Magyars – the generals of the imperial army, the international feudal lords, the Czechs (because they regarded Austria as a pro-

tection against Germany), the loyalists of the Alpine provinces and the conservative supporters of the dynasty generally. On the side of Hungary were those who wanted union between Germany and Austria, the pro-German Viennese who looked towards Frankfurt – and the more radical they were the more they did so. If Hungary became independent, if the Habsburg monarchy collapsed, German Austria could become a member state of the German Empire, mopping up Bohemia in the process. In the imperial diet which met in Vienna in July to prepare a constitution for Austria, the supporters of a 'greater' Germany were in the minority; the majority was with the Slavs and the loyalist Austrians. The diet, a wild, multilingual gathering, established at least one lasting claim to fame: it abolished the remains of hereditary serfdom, the surviving feudal services of the peasants, thus giving modest satisfaction to the most numerous class of the country.

Vienna, the capital, on the other hand was in the throes of a revolution and of a constantly growing German nationalism as well as social demands, and therefore sympathized vociferously and menacingly with Hungary. Nobody has ever counted the radicals or the supporters of the dynasty in Vienna. It is possible that there too the loyal Austrians were in the majority. The workers and the unemployed, hard hit by the general paralysis of the economy, the politically conscious lower middle class, the students, young and romantic – they all wanted something quite different and new: a great democratic and socially just Germany, maybe as a monarchy under good Archduke John, maybe as a republic. As the summer passed Vienna fell increasingly under democratic control. The town was administered by a revolutionary central committee, a Committee of Safety. While civic guards, student legions and workers' battalions organized themselves there was no sign of the imperial government. Newspapers like *Der Mann des Volkes* (Man of the People), *Die Rote Mütze* (Red Cap), *Der Ohnehose* (Sansculotte) and *Der Proletarier* (The Proletarian) spoke a dramatic language. In the early autumn Vienna, rather than Baden or the Rhineland, was the hope of all those who wanted to revive the flagging German

revolution. Karl Marx put in a personal appearance in order to give scientific advice. The explosion came when a German regiment disobeyed an order to march against the Hungarians. The Minister of War was massacred in his office and the feeble-minded Emperor escaped for the second time. Red Vienna, under a city commandant elected by the municipal council, prepared to stand on its own feet.

But whom should it choose as its ally? Looking back on these grim events a hundred years later it is easy to talk. The Hungarians were a long way away, and between them and the Viennese were Jellačić's Croats. The National Assembly in Frankfurt felt even more impotent on the question of Vienna than on the Danish issue, it met under the protection of Prussian guns and was more afraid of radical democracy than of reaction in Prussia and Austria. The French Revolution was over and Paris was ruled by the army as protector of the conservative middle class in town and country. In the East Tsar Nicholas lay in wait with 500,000 soldiers. For the moment, however, Russia's help was not needed. Red Vienna found itself isolated in conservative German-Austrian and Slav country, isolated from a good part of its own population. From the south-east loyalist troops marched against the rebellious capital, 'wild men', as their leaders said warningly. There were regiments among them which to the Prussian ambassador 'looked more like Asiatic Turks than Europeans' – and who were to behave accordingly. Prince Windisch-Graetz, the conqueror of Prague, advanced from Bohemia to put an end to the rule of the Viennese 'gutter snipes' as he put it. The Czechs, his enemies of yesterday, gave him their explicit blessing: as long as he fought the Viennese supporters of a 'greater' Germany they would assuredly not stab him in the back. The conquest of the town was pursued methodically and without mercy; whatever hope, idealism, good will, youth, whatever extravagant folly and fury had held sway there for half a year was put down in a few days. The red terror was followed by the white which is not a whit better and often even more brutal.

The victims of the courts martial included a member of the

Paulskirche, the honest, popular leader of the left, Robert Blum. He had come to Austria at the behest of his party, to observe, to clarify and to help. Since September Blum had been deeply disheartened by the development in Germany for which he had risked everything. He thought of emigrating or of retiring forever from politics but remained from a sense of duty, without hope. Finding himself in the middle of the battle for the defence of Vienna he took charge of a unit, thus, legally speaking, committing a crime. But his execution was a political act, arranged between Windisch-Graetz and the new Austrian head of government, Prince zu Schwarzenberg, to show the German National Assembly what they thought of it and who was in control.

The fall of Vienna saved the old Austrian system. The army leaders, elegant, grey-haired, determined noblemen, Windisch-Graetz, Schwarzenberg, Radetzky and Jellačić, had forced the disintegrating monarchy together again. For whose sake? For themselves? They could probably have preserved their positions in the new national states. For the sake of the Germans? Windisch-Graetz occasionally spoke of the Germanic interest which was best served by preserving the Danubian monarchy; but these feudal Austrian Europeans were not really German patriots. For the sake of the House of Habsburg? They despised the Emperor; the Archdukes flirted with Germany and had already shared out Austria between themselves. For the sake of the world into which they had been born and which they could not imagine without the imperial state? That would probably be the most accurate reply. The new Prime Minister, Felix Schwarzenberg, was a master of the game of power politics, a man of cool audacity who was shortly to reveal his political character. He dispatched the diet to the provinces, to Kremsier, where it was allowed to go on talking for a while. As long as the Frankfurt Assembly existed it was useful to have an Austrian counterpart. In the Hungarian theatre of war Windisch-Graetz was given supreme command. As the feeble-minded Emperor no longer fitted into the new order Schwarzenberg got rid of him in December, replacing him by his nephew, the eighteen-year-old Archduke Francis or, as he was now called in memory of the good Emperor

Joseph, Francis Joseph. In the same month Louis Napoleon Bonaparte was elected President of the French Republic with an overwhelming majority so that Francis Joseph and Napoleon III presented themselves to Europe together, two symbols and supporters of the restored order.

In a special edition the *Kreuzzeitung*, the Prussian reactionaries' paper, jubilantly told its readers of the change in Austria's affairs.

Last night Vienna was taken by storm. Most of the university leaders and the mob fled in cowardly fashion, deserting those whom they had corrupted . . . The rule of anarchy and of the red republic has been overthrown and the power of the law has triumphed. May the hydra never again raise its accursed head anywhere.

Prussia could not lag behind where Austria led the way. As soon as the first measures of Schwarzenberg's rule by the sword became known in Berlin King Frederick William IV decided to put an end to the revolution. Though Berlin was less radical than Vienna it had not been possible to restore order completely between spring and early autumn. Many factors encouraged a *coup d'état*: the gifted but mentally unstable monarch still talked of reviving the Middle Ages; weak, vacillating governments followed one another in quick succession; and the constituent assembly was definitely orientated more to the 'left' than the German one. On the other side there was the traditional Prussian army, intact, supported by the Junkers and probably also the greater part of the rural population; there was a determined, well-organized reactionary party, used to power, which was learning the modern craft of propaganda; there were the middle classes, organized in the Berlin National Guard, frightened by the workers, with whom they had frequent clashes, and consequently driven increasingly to the right; and while the language and behaviour of the Radicals and democratic congresses became more extreme, the political interest of the general population declined and gave way to a desire for peace and order. There was no need for a repetition of what had happened in Vienna, particularly as the defeat of the Viennese had provided a discouraging example. On 2 November the country was presented

with an energetic conservative, General Count Brandenburg, as Prime Minister. On 9 November the Prussian assembly was transferred to the provinces, on 14 November martial law was declared in Berlin and on 5 December the ministers proclaimed a constitution, hurriedly thought up by themselves, and declared the national assembly dissolved. All this happened with only the symbolic use of force. What in Austria had been a fearful tragedy in Prussia became a tragi-comedy. The parliamentarians exercised passive resistance, allowed themselves to be pursued from building to building for a few days and appealed to the people not to pay their taxes. Then there was peace in Prussia. The 'dictated' constitution seemed at first sight more liberal than might have been expected; some of its provisions were based on the work of the national assembly.

8. Grossdeutsch and Kleindeutsch

So much for Austria and Prussia. But what about the German Reich? The Assembly in the *Paulskirche* had done a thorough job and until the late autumn had concentrated mainly on the basic rights of the citizen which were to be enshrined in the preamble to the constitution. These basic rights were excellent. If there was almost nothing about the social responsibility of the state there was almost everything about the guarantees of liberty, the freedom of movement and the equality before the law needed by the individual in order to look after himself. The Assembly had wanted to set up a constitutional state in which there would be freedom for political activity, science and life generally, and one must not make fun of such a serious effort. The difficulty was that whenever the Assembly wanted to achieve something real its own unreality became apparent. Although the 'basic rights' were published in the *Reichsgesetzblatt*, not one of the great German states, neither Prussia nor Bavaria not to mention Austria, adopted them. The Frankfurt deputies must really have

thought highly of themselves that in such circumstances they successfully avoided for so long the painful suspicion of living in cloud-cuckoo-land.

Once the basic rights had been disposed of the Assembly valiantly went on to discuss the constitution proper. Here the inevitable question was where the frontiers of the Empire should be drawn. The members of the constitutional commission found the answer: 'No part of the German Reich shall belong to a state with non-German territories.' The German Austrians were therefore confronted with the choice of joining Germany or remaining united with the Hungarians, Southern Slavs and Northern Italians. During the winter the words *grossdeutsch* ('greater' German) and *kleindeutsch* ('little' German) came into vogue; to unify Germany without Austria was the *kleindeutsch* solution, with Austria the *grossdeutsch* solution. However, there never were any proper *kleindeutsch* or *grossdeutsch* parties, because the advocates of unification without Austria would only too gladly have accepted Austria into the new fatherland, provided Austria agreed to make the necessary sacrifice – after all, who would not be 'great' rather than 'little', whole rather than mutilated? The supporters of unification with Austria wanted precisely this, so long as the Habsburg Empire was expected to collapse. Once it had been restored they had no positive policy and merely tried to prevent or water down the alternative solution. The whole of Austria could not be united with Germany; a German nation-state which included Milan, Venice, Zagreb, Budapest and Cracow was nonsense. But such a complete unification was all that Felix Schwarzenberg offered, either because he really believed it to be possible or as a piece of sheer mockery. On 27 November he announced that the preservation of the Austrian monarchy was a European necessity, and that it would remain as it was. On 4 March 1849 he dismissed the Austrian Diet and decreed the constitution of a centralized unitary state. A stroke of the pen did away with the historic rights of the Magyars, Croats, Italians and also the Germans. Henceforth the multi-lingual colossus was to be *one* state, like France. On 9 March the Iron Prince let it be known that this state demanded to become a member of the

new German federal Empire, with the proviso that it must have more votes in the federal parliament than all the rest of Germany, Prussia included.

Now the situation was clear, unification with Austria was impossible. The only alternative was the *kleindeutsch* solution – Prussian leadership, or nothing at all. Nothing at all – unless one believed in the possibility of a new revolution which would sweep away Austria and Prussia. It was certainly possible to want this, but unless there were very, very many people who did and unless they were very well organized, armed and led, it was like wanting to conquer the moon. Some Bavarian Catholics and south-west German democratic anti-Prussians amused themselves for a while trying to find clever solutions with Austria; but under any name these would in fact have been tantamount to a return to the old German Confederation.

In the early spring of 1849, therefore, the majority of the National Assembly, right as well as left, reluctantly became *kleindeutsch*; and the two sides now worked better together than ever before. A number of concessions were made to the left: universal, equal and direct male suffrage, a cabinet responsible to the Diet and a president or emperor whose veto could merely delay the Diet's decisions. The left for its part accepted with a sigh the principle of hereditary monarchy with an emperor provided by the Prussian royal house. Politics, after all, is the art of compromise, and it was impossible to get away from Prussia. Once the constitution was adopted the Assembly proceeded to elect the emperor; with an unimpressive majority it chose the King of Prussia. It was significant that the minority did not vote for anybody; the supporters of a greater Germany had no alternative to offer. The question now was whether this time the decision on paper would become a reality.

The Prussian government – set up after the *coup d'état* – had thrown out promising hints in the course of the winter; it was suggested that a closer German federation under Prussian leadership was being seriously considered, that it would then be possible somehow to come to terms with Austria in a wider federation. Such was the view of the government, of the new Prussian

popular representatives and even of the arch-conservative Prince William. The decision rested with the King. Frederick William IV was attracted by the idea of doing something great and historic for Germany; he vacillated between ambition and hatred of all things modern, liberal and democratic. The second leaning predominated. To the deputation offering him the crown he made one of his more pompous speeches; the parliamentarians had to study it carefully afterwards before they discovered the 'no'. Among his friends the monarch spoke more clearly of the 'filthy crown', the 'sausage roll', the 'dog collar', the 'crown by the grace of bakers and butchers'. The drift of his speech, he said, had been: 'I cannot say yes or no. One accepts or rejects only things that can be offered – and you have nothing to offer. Such questions I settle with my peers. But before we part let me tell you the truth: against democrats soldiers are the only remedy! Farewell.'

A pathetic tale, sad to relate. Once again, for the last time, the German National Assembly discovered that its revolution had been a piece of April foolery. In vain did the Prime Minister von Gagern, implore the King to say to which articles of the constitution he objected; the Assembly was prepared for any revision. In vain did no less than twenty-eight small German states announce under pressure from their populations their acceptance of the constitution and the Emperor. Prussia remained inflexible, and following Prussia's lead Bavaria, Saxony and Hanover. Was the work of a year to end in the wastepaper basket, were the great hopes of March 1848 to end in nothing? The Assembly decided that its work was nonetheless valid and announced that there would be elections to the constitutional diet in the whole of Germany. This was a revolutionary step or

9. *The Civil War*

There was still so much inflammable matter in Germany, so much passion for the cause of unity, so much fury about the treachery of the governments that in May something like a second revolution came to the assistance of the helpless representatives of the people. It was the revolution which would have taken a very different course in March 1848, had the princes in their anxiety not 'granted' everything. Meanwhile the old forces had recovered and reorganized themselves and as they now took back what they had granted a year before there were popular revolts in many places, simultaneously or in quick succession; in Saxony, in the Prussian Rhineland, in Baden and in the Bavarian Palatinate. Was this a last, unexpected opportunity for the National Assembly? Some critics think that it could have placed itself at the head of this movement which was in urgent need of leadership, given it legitimacy, surrounded itself with rebellious troops and overrun the country. For the moment there was no threat of Austrian intervention because the Hungarians were still fighting a successful war against Vienna. This is what we read. The German National Assembly, however, did not take this opportunity; it acted in accordance with the law under which it had assumed power. In old age one does not change and the Assembly was old after a squandered year. It never put to the German princes the basic question of all struggle for power: can you kill me or can I kill you? The Assembly's aim, its language, its way of life had been to reconcile the old with the new. Now under much less favourable conditions it could not – or at any rate did not – risk the ruthless trial of strength which it had missed the previous year. It failed to give the hoped-for leadership and while it protested and negotiated a little, the Austrian representatives, then the Prussians and then all those of the right and the centre bolted. At the beginning of June the rest, the so-called 'rump parliament', less than a hundred men, moved to Stuttgart; the King of Württemberg, under pressure from his subjects, who were enthusiastically in favour of German union, adopted an

equivocal attitude. He did not need to maintain it for long. On 18 June he ordered the closure of the council chamber and had the German National Assembly, what remained of it, chased away by mounted police.

The revolutionary energy displayed belatedly in the cause of the Reich constitution was squandered in a welter of blood and suppressed with a super abundance of military force, first in Dresden, then in the Rhineland, in the Palatinate and in Baden. Prince William of Prussia, who a year earlier had hastily escaped from the revolution to Britain, now had the satisfaction of leading two full Prussian army corps to south-west Germany. There was a repetition of what had happened in Vienna in the previous October, inviting the same kind of melancholy comment. Neither revolution nor counter-revolution is attractive. What attracts in the one is idealism and honest, unselfish hope, what offends is dilettantism, melodramatic posturing, quarrels among the leaders and the abruptness of change. What attracts in the other is the fact that it restores order, what Hegel called 'the truth of power', what offends is self-righteous brutality, the vindictiveness of the victors, and the sterility of victory. All this was experienced by tormented Baden from May to June 1849, and later. The accurate historian should mention both the bravery of the rebellious Baden troops in their fight against the Prussians and the quarrelsome and childish behaviour of the provisional revolutionary government, the chaos which it left behind. It should be stated that many inhabitants were grateful to Prussia for restoring order while others hated the north German oppressor. History rarely permits the clear-cut judgement which the reader would like.

The end was summary executions. The Prussian victor knew no mercy, not even for the people who had fought for a constitution under which the Prussian King would have become emperor. What blind injustice, what cruel confusion. The German revolution had wanted to be different from other revolutions, friendly, tolerant, legal; it suffered for it by ending in an interminable chain of treason trials.

The turn of the Hungarians came a few months later, in

August, not without assistance from the Tsar. Nicholas I finally did what he had contemplated for eighteen months: he sent an army to the aid of the Emperor Francis Joseph which put an end to the revolutionary, heroic, though unfortunately not very just struggle of the Magyars.

10. The Prussian Union

After the tragedy came the satiric drama. Having betrayed all hopes put in him and crushed them with his troops Frederick William IV nevertheless wanted the glory of being the man who unified Germany, or something similar; of course without democracy, so that he would be dealing with his peers and not with representatives of the people. With this aim in mind Prussia, Saxony and Hanover concluded in May 1849 the so-called Three Kings' Alliance to which other small north German states acceded. The idea came from a member of the Frankfurt right and friend of Frederick William, General von Radowitz, a conservative but imaginative man who certainly had Germany's well-being at heart. He wanted to save what could be saved from the bankruptcy of the *Paulskirche*, if only a closer confederation of northern Germany. For a brief period the vacillating mind of the King was won over to the idea, as it had already been won over to several others. It says little for the acumen or the dignity of the Frankfurt liberals or 'Constitutionalists' that they too clutched at this straw, at the very moment when Prussian troops were conquering south-west Germany; they were once again deceived by the impostor in Potsdam. The Prussian parliament agreed; the Frankfurt constitution was borrowed and suitably improved to give the monarch more authority. In March 1850, after much humming and hawing, Prussia convened in Erfurt a 'parliament', composed of the states of the 'North German Union', in which the liberal celebrities of the *Paulskirche*, Gagern, Dahlmann and Simson, could once again bask in their

importance. They were happy with little. A witty young reactionary who appeared in Erfurt, the Prussian delegate von Bismarck-Schönhausen, called the union 'a hybrid of timorous thirst for power and tame revolution'. The King wanted power provided it could be obtained without danger and the liberals had certainly been tamed. But change was no longer possible without great danger. Whereas in March 1848, even in March 1849, it might have been possible to have complete German unity now even the small part of it which Frederick William lusted after could no longer be got. Austria did what it could not have done in 1848 or even in 1849; it vetoed any 'close federation'. Behind this veto was the iron will of Prince Felix Schwarzenberg ('We shall not let ourselves be thrown out of Germany', he said) and an Austrian army reputed to be superior to that of Prussia – besides Austria's powerful ally, Tsar Nicholas. Even if Austria alone could not have settled the issue the will of the Tsar was decisive. As Karl Marx, in exile in London, shrewdly foresaw:

Austrian and south German troops are lining up in Franconia and Bohemia in order to force Prussia back into the federal parliament. Prussia is also arming . . . But this noise will lead nowhere . . . Neither the King of Prussia nor the Emperor of Austria, only the Tsar is sovereign. In the end rebellious Prussia will bow to his command . . .

This is exactly what happened. For reactionary Prussia the liberating 'people's war' which the German radicals had wanted to wage against Russia two years earlier was impossible. Prussia gave in and conceded all Schwarzenberg's demands, the restoration of the German Confederation as established in 1815, Austria's presidential position, Denmark's control of Schleswig-Holstein – everything. Three years after March 1848 Francis Joseph and his Minister Schwarzenberg were in a stronger position in Germany than old Metternich had ever been. The 'March Ministers' had long vanished from the small German states, the March achievements had been watered down or suppressed. Several thousand fine speeches, several thousand dead and several thousand trials – such was the harvest of 1848 and 1849. Of the great, hopeful turmoil nothing but disappointment, shame and derision seemed to remain.

2. REFLECTION

1. *German and French Revolution*

People claim that in 1848 the revolution could have been successful in Germany if it had done this or that at this or that moment. What are 'revolutions' anyway? Is it desirable that they should occur occasionally and is it desirable that they should be successful? One must not shirk this general question if one wants to judge the events described above.

According to Marx, revolutions occur periodically; whenever the means of production become too powerful for the system in which they operate. In other words, when the political and economic ruling class is no longer equal to its task. Then it must step down. Because no ruling class abdicates voluntarily it remains in control until the whole of the old order breaks down and is forcibly swept away, administration, legal system and all that goes with it. That is revolution, and from it emerges the new ruling class . . . The Marxist view of revolution contains only a small element of truth; it is not borne out by history. Doubtless there are social or economic 'classes', but they are nothing like the distinct and clearly defined groups that Marx sees in them. Neither do they gain or relinquish power so abruptly. The rise of the European middle class was a very slow process which can be traced back to the Middle Ages. That does not mean that the great French Revolution which began in 1789 was not to some extent connected with the demands of the bourgeoisie and the peasants. However, it was directed less against the aristocracy, which had long ceased to be the ruling class, than against a system of government at once weak and annoying, antiquated and bankrupt. A modernization of the French state was certainly desirable; that the revolution degenerated into bloody civil war was at first mainly the fault of the court and its foolish resistance. As the tension grew extraneous elements entered: exaggerated idealism, fear and passion generated by the European war, collective and individual ambition and violent quackery which

achieved little of real value. What the French Revolution could accomplish it had accomplished by 1792, and Napoleon essentially returned to the position of that year. Change, reform and adaptation of the law to new economic and moral conditions are necessary in history, but revolutions in the form of sanguinary tragedies, sudden violent fundamental upheavals are neither necessary nor desirable. Nor do they ever lead to what their leaders envisage. Britain, for example, has managed until now to do without revolution although there have certainly been social changes. The so-called English revolutions of the seventeenth century were definitely not revolutions in the Marxian sense; if anything they were counter-revolutions. It was the kings who tried to introduce an alien absolutism and who were defeated by the *old* parliamentary system in the Civil War of the sixteen-forties and again in 1688.

The French Revolution was such a dramatic, such an impressive event that it dominated politics and the interpretation of history even in the middle of the nineteenth century. Marx and Engels based their whole theory of revolution on it, and, although they pretended to have many examples, it is no accident that they always chose the same one, because in fact they had no other. They really only knew two revolutions, the bourgeois or French one which had taken place recently and the proletarian revolution which would take place shortly. Most German democrats and radicals were strongly under the influence of the French Revolution, whose language and gestures they copied. In Baden the form of address current during the civil war of 1848-9 was 'citizen', as in Paris in Robespierre's day.

But conditions in Germany in 1848 differed fundamentally from those of France in the late eighteenth century. There was no bankrupt administration on the verge of collapse; the Austrians were not badly governed and the Prussians were well governed. No helpless monarch convened the old estates because he was in financial difficulties. On the contrary, the Germans rebelled against the effective, often all too effective bureaucratic state. Their demand was for greater freedom of action, legal safeguards, political participation (which meant the control of the

government by popular representatives), and above all for national unity, the participation of the whole nation in all important questions. This longing existed, and although today we are no longer as optimistic about the idea of the nation-state as our ancestors were a hundred years ago, we can understand the longing. The Germans felt that their standing in the world did not correspond to their strength, and that Metternich's Confederation was not the right instrument with which to acquire the position due to them. A nation becomes one by feeling itself to be one. The Germans in the middle of the nineteenth century clearly had this feeling, and because they regarded themselves as a numerous, strong people with a glorious past, they wanted to make an impact beyond their frontiers. The defeat of the revolution justified those who regarded such an attempt as nonsense and who only believed in force, the force of the Prussian army or of the revolutionary working class. It also justified those who now took even less interest in politics than before, and who turned to better things, to making money, to science; also perhaps to literature and to metaphysics which allowed them to despise history.

2. The Great Powers and the German Revolution

Historians have recently expressed the view that the attempts to unify Germany in 1848-9 failed because of external factors; that the three Great Powers, Britain, Russia and France were opposed to it, and that this opposition rather than reservations of a philosophical nature was the real reason why Frederick William IV refused the imperial crown. The argument is difficult to refute because in history one can hardly ever state with certainty that something might have happened if . . . The great coalition which proved fateful to Germany in 1914 was certainly not probable in 1848; one might even go so far as to say that Britain would

definitely not have gone to war to prevent the unification of Germany if carried out with restraint. In fact it was the British Foreign Secretary who finally made the most sensible proposal on the difficult question of Schleswig-Holstein, namely to give the northern, predominantly Danish part of Schleswig to Denmark, but all the rest to Germany. Although individual voices were raised in protest in London, the opinion of some member of Parliament or other does not prove that Britain as a whole wanted to prevent German unity. The government and the country in general adopted a waiting, friendly attitude. France was itself in the throes of a revolution, and during the decisive spring months of 1848 was quite incapable of intervening. There, too, feelings varied; according to their own revolutionary and democratic theory the French should have welcomed the unification of Germany as much as that of Italy, though age-old arguments of power politics spoke against it. In the spring the French Foreign Minister and the Russian Chancellor did in fact discuss whether a united Germany of forty million or – with Austria – seventy million people constituted a threat to France and Russia. At the same time different combinations, such as France, Prussia and Britain, or Poland, Germany and France, were considered. Everything seemed possible in such confused times and the few pieces that existed on the European chessboard were moved about in all possible directions in the minds of excited diplomats and journalists. Yet nothing was thought through to the end and in fact nothing happened. Only in the war against Denmark did Prussia in the end find itself confronted by the great powers. The argument that Germany was not even permitted to have little Schleswig and would therefore certainly not have been permitted to unite does not hold water. It was unfortunate that Germany allowed itself to be provoked and began its internal unification with a war abroad. The establishment of a new great power in the centre of Europe demanded prudence and statesman-like leadership.

The view that Europe conspired against the 'good Germany' of 1848 and that thereafter the only alternative was the 'bad' Prussia-Germany created by Bismarck can therefore not be

adequately substantiated. It was, moreover, rejected by Bismarck himself, who, after all, knew no small amount about European diplomacy. In his memoirs he speaks at length about the rocks on which the revolution foundered, without mentioning external relations. On the contrary, he thinks that in March 1848 and again in the spring of 1849, Prussia had the opportunity for decisive action. But Prussia did not want to act, nor did Bismarck himself, although not because of the international situation.

3. The Problem of the Nationalities

In 1848 no thought, no action was carried through to the end. But several elements appeared for the first time which were later responsible for much bloodshed and for the failure of thoughts and actions. It became clear that it was extremely difficult to isolate the destiny of Germany from that of other nations, and that it was therefore very difficult to establish a German nation-state. Until 1848 it had been thought that oppressed and divided peoples – Germans, Italians and Poles – shared a common aim and would live together in a brotherly fashion after their liberation. ‘Europe is being re-shaped according to its nationalities’, wrote the future Field-Marshal von Moltke in March 1848. ‘All foreign elements will disappear; as long as we regain everything German we shall be richly compensated.’ How to cut away everything non-German, how to regain everything German, that was the difficulty, in Posen, in Bohemia, in the whole Austrian Empire. In addition to the peoples who had hitherto been theoretically allowed their freedom there now suddenly appeared those of whom nobody had thought so far, like the Czechs and the South Slavs. When it became evident that the liberated peoples would not behave like loving brothers and that it was impossible to draw a fair dividing line between them, the German liberals readily agreed to let might come before right, or their own right before the rights of others. In the great Polish debate in the

Paulskirche the victorious party was the one which put the interest of the Germans before that of the Poles.

It is high time that we awaken from the romantic self-renunciation which made us admire all sorts of other nationalities while we ourselves languished in shameful bondage, trampled on by all the world; it is high time that we awaken to a healthy national egoism which, to put it frankly, places the welfare and honour of the fatherland above everything else . . . I admit without beating about the bush that our right is only the right of the stronger, the right of the conqueror . . .

This was said by Jordan, the member of the Assembly probably best acquainted with the situation in Poland. Dahlmann, a great liberal professor, spoke of the *power* for which the German people really longed. Heinrich von Gagern, the advocate of unification without Austria, personally also preferred a solution which permitted the establishment of a 'greater' Germany, or rather of an all-embracing Germany of totally unrealistic dimensions.

I wonder if in the national interest we can . . . in future leave the non-German provinces of Austria to themselves and to chance. I believe that it is the role of the German people to be great, to be one of those who rule . . . What kind of unity must we strive for? A kind that will enable us to fulfil our destiny in the East; a unity that will enable us to make those peoples along the Danube that have neither the vocation nor the right to independence satellites of our planetary system.

It would be wrong simply to condemn the nationalism of the German liberals. To abandon the Germans in Posen to the turbulent Polish majority was really asking a great deal. As long as power was power and the right of the strongest prevailed everywhere in the world the Germans were bound to prefer their own rule to that of the Slavs. It was not the ideas of these men, however irresponsible and lacking in awareness of the immense difficulties of the problem, that were to blame, but the really insuperable tangle of the central and east European nationalities. The problem has never been solved by anybody; therefore we must not demand a solution from the men of 1848. It was their

misfortune to be the first to discover it and to rush straight into it with simple-minded optimism.

In 1848 it also became clear for the first time that the concept of the nation-state would sooner or later destroy the Austrian monarchy; a prospect which inevitably implied various dangers and dangerous temptations for Germany. Czech nationalism was an imitation of German nationalism, and was childishly unoriginal, particularly where it wanted to be very original.

It is fortunate [wrote the poet Franz Grillparzer] that Palacký's views are not shared by the majority of his countrymen but only by a small fraction, the party of the 'Germanized' Czechs. Having learned everything that they know from the Germans, as a sign of gratitude, they also imitate the Germans' latest follies. Where does this outcry about nationality, this emphasis on an indigenous language and history come from but the German universities, where learned fools have provoked the spirit of a quiet, sensible nation to madness and crime. There is the cradle of your Slavomania and if the Bohemian declaims loudest against the German he is merely a German translated into Bohemian.

How true. But if the Germans became nationalists not only in 'little Germany' but also on Habsburg territory, the Slavs were in the end forced to defend themselves by imitation. Grillparzer, an Austrian of the old stamp, logically despised German as much as Slav nationalism. He mocked in 1848:

*O Herr, lass Dich herbei,
Und mach die Deutschen frei,
Dass endlich das Geschrei
Danach zu Ende sei!**

and prophesied more grimly:

*Der Weg der neueren Menschheit geht
Von der Humanität
Durch die Nationalität
Zur Bestialität.†*

*Oh Lord, deign to set the Germans free so that their clamour for freedom shall cease at last.

†The road of modern man leads from humanity by way of nationalism to bestiality.

But a solitary Viennese poet who occupied a not very important position in the civil service could not prevent the aberrations of history.

4. *The Class Struggle*

According to another theory, propounded particularly by Marx and his pupils, the revolution foundered on the rock of the class struggle. The liberal bourgeoisie was frightened of the democratic lower middle classes and both were afraid of the proletariat. Therefore there was no united front against the old powers, the monarchy, the aristocracy and the army. Because black-red-gold was frightened of red it yielded to Prussian black-and-white and Austrian black-and-yellow. We must briefly examine this view, brilliantly presented by Marx and Engels in their *Revolution and Konterrevolution in Deutschland*.

The German revolution was determined by political, not by social or economic factors. Although there was some localized social unrest in the forties it did not produce the events of March 1848. The middle classes rose against the absolutism of the princes which seemed to them out of date. Shortly after the event the revolution was rightly called the 'bourgeois' revolution; more recently it has become known as the 'revolution of the intellectuals'. That expression, too, is apposite because professors and writers played an important role both in preparing the revolt and in the *Paulskirche*. Only when the revolution was under way did a number of distinct opposition groups develop: the democrats parted company with the liberals and were in turn left by a group which might be described as radical republicans or social democrats.

But one must not think in terms of a great proletarian party such as developed towards the end of the century. There was not the slightest possibility of anything on that scale in Germany in 1848. There were still far more craftsmen than factory workers

and more peasants than craftsmen and factory workers together. Of these there were not more than a million at the most and many of them still regarded themselves as craftsmen and regretted losing the security and status that went with the craftsman's position. The workers' congresses which met in Berlin and Frankfurt in 1848 did not discuss the dictatorship of the proletariat but matters of direct concern: the protection of handicrafts, of apprentices and journeymen, the promotion of small-scale industry through patent legislation, export subsidies, cheap imports of raw materials, and also free education, progressive income tax, the welfare of the old and so on. Those were the outlines of a liberal social policy, no more. The most successful labour leader of 1848, Stephan Born, although he knew and respected Marx, abandoned the master's teaching as soon as it came to practical work. 'I would have been laughed at or pitied,' he says in his reminiscences, 'had I behaved like a Communist, which anyway I no longer was. What did I care about distant centuries if the hour offered an abundance of problems and work.' Born organized, if not the world revolution, a printers' trade union which quickly achieved results in the wage struggle everywhere in Germany. He also set about the foundation of a great workers' 'fraternity' whose local committees were to intervene in wage negotiations, establish building societies, and work for political and general education. Many such associations were founded, but they were all suppressed by the reaction of the fifties.

Liberal or democratic citizens really had nothing to fear from the beginnings of this practical workers' movement. The theories of Marx and his Communist League, domiciled in London, Paris and Cologne, had a few hundred German supporters at the most. Why then this fear of the 'Reds' which Engels mentions and which undoubtedly existed long before 1848?

The German middle class may have made the same mistake as Marx, who busily encouraged them in this: they transposed the conditions of the class struggle which existed in Britain and Paris to Germany, where they did not exist. Naked, shameless class war had, it is true, been fought in Paris in June 1848, and the whole theory was taken from there. Muddle-headed people

easily assumed that similar things would happen in Germany or were happening already. This may explain why at certain critical moments the middle class was really frightened of the Reds, why the National Guard in Berlin refused to admit workers to its ranks, and in Vienna in October urged the surrender of the city, whereas the workers wanted to fight on. The reactionaries welcomed this fear. 'Democracy', 'socialism', 'communism' and the end of the world were muddled into a single terror – a trick successfully repeated the world over to the present day.

There was no sharp, conscious class struggle in Germany in 1848. But the Progressive Party split very early and it is obvious that this split was bound to weaken the drive of the whole movement. For the paralysing consequences both extremes must be held responsible, the docile orators in the *Paulskirche* as much as the irresponsible rioters, like Hecker and Struve, and the champagne-drinking revolutionary writers, like Georg Herwegh.

Marx and Engels did not play a happy role during the two years of revolution. The best that can be said for them is that they had almost no influence. Their whole theory that the bourgeoisie and the lower middle class would now come to power, only to be overthrown by the proletariat, did not fit into the German conditions and was highly artificial. How was it possible to support a movement that was allowed to be victorious merely in order to be immediately stamped out? Someone who was interested only in the second revolution could do nothing useful for the first. On the occasion of a trial of Communists in Cologne after the victory of the old powers, Marx protested in the *New York Tribune* against the monstrous procedure of the Prussian government: 'How can the Communists be called conspirators against the Prussian state as they are only conspirators against the state that will come *after* the present one, against the bourgeois republic ...' Nothing is more characteristic of Marxism than the twisted logic of this argument. Nine out of ten Germans at the middle of the century belonged to the 'lower middle classes', peasants, craftsmen, small businessmen, teachers and so on. Someone who despised these nine-tenths of all Germans as thoroughly as Marx and Engels did could not formulate German policy; he could

only *see* the weaknesses of the bourgeois revolution, and this they both did, with eagle eyes. If their criticism was unconstructive their positive proposals were wild and questionable. In August 1848, for example, during the Schleswig-Holstein crisis, Marx asked for nothing less than a large-scale German war against the three great powers, Britain, Russia and France, from which alone a true revolution might blossom forth. By right Denmark, as well as Sweden and Norway, must be ruled by Germany because Germany was at any rate more revolutionary than those countries; their civilization Marx described as characterized by 'brutality against women, permanent drunkenness and lacrimose sentimentality, alternating with berserk fury'. For the national aspirations of the Austrian Slavs, particularly the Czechs, Marx and Engels again had nothing but contempt; they were under German rule and under German rule they must remain. If the Slavs continued to betray the revolution there would be a 'war of extermination and ruthless terrorism – not in the interest of Germany but in the interest of the revolution'. Germany, on the other hand, most of whose inhabitants he so deeply despised, was for Marx the fatherland of the abstract but terrible goddess called 'revolution' and was therefore destined to rule.

When nothing came of the world revolution for the moment the two friends were deeply disappointed. They told another friend, Techow, who saw them in London in August 1850, that they would soon emigrate to America. 'It was a matter of complete indifference to them if this miserable Europe was ruined as it surely would be without social revolution.'

5. Leaders and Led

The revolution lacked good leadership. In the *Paulskirche* there were great scholars, able administrators, a few successful businessmen and witty writers all of whom made fine speeches and

uttered profound things. What the liberals did not know was that in politics there is always an element of struggle which inevitably becomes more ruthless at moments of crisis when the legal framework trembles. Only the extreme right and left senses this. Professor Dahlmann, whose agitation in September 1848 resulted in the overthrow of the 'imperial government' because he wanted to continue the war over Schleswig even without Prussia, had not thought how this could be done. A few days later therefore he shamefacedly joined the supporters of the armistice. That incident compromised the whole of the great party to which Dahlmann belonged. Bismarck drew a malicious portrait of Heinrich von Gagern, first president of the National Assembly and third 'Imperial Prime Minister'. The two men met in Erfurt in 1850; there is something ironical in the tremendously superior formality with which the unsuccessful founder of the Empire of 1848 met the successful founder of the Empire of 1871. 'The phrase gusher,' said Bismarck, 'addressed me as though I was a public meeting.'

'Phrase-gusher' – the expression might have come from Marx. In fact, the Communist and the Junker had several things in common in their judgement of the year 1848. For both it was the first great political experience, a year of apprenticeship. In March 1848 Bismarck wanted to organize a reactionary *coup d'état*, a counter-revolution, while Marx wished to push the revolution to a radical conclusion. But neither was yet in a sufficiently strong position to achieve anything so decisive; they remained in the background, men of the future. Both came to the conclusion that in future things would have to be done very differently. 'The great questions of the age,' said Bismarck in 1862, 'are not decided by speeches and majority decisions – that was the big mistake of 1848 and 1849 – but by blood and iron.' By blood and iron – that is roughly the lesson which Marx drew from the 'mistakes of 1848'. All his life he waited for the true revolution which had not come in 1848 and which, when it came, would have to be conducted very differently; with scientific thoroughness, and without mercy either for the monarchy and bourgeoisie or for the lower middle classes. The science, the strategy of revolu-

tion, developed by Marx after the collapse of 1849, was taken over by Lenin and successfully applied in 1917. Lenin's historical achievement can thus be indirectly traced back to the defeat of the men of 1848.

But that was yet to come; the immediate victors were men of a different type, soldiers of fortune in search of power, energetic, cynical adventurers with a touch of fantasy, Felix Schwarzenberg in Austria and Louis Napoleon in France. They were the beneficiaries of the general disenchantment – and also of the economic prosperity which began in the summer of 1849.

The losers were the nameless legions who had fought and hoped for a worthier life. Many of them emigrated, mostly to America. At least 80,000 people, more than a twentieth of the population, emigrated from Baden as a result of the revolt of 1849. After 1849 the number of emigrants from the whole of Germany, which in the forties had amounted to about 100,000 a year, rose to about a quarter of a million annually. Those who dared to take the plunge into the unknown were the most active and courageous; among them were born leaders of men who later achieved fame in American public life. For the United States the influx of German immigrants was an incalculable gain.

6. What Remained

The events of 1848–9 did, however, bring changes, both good and bad. Before 1848, in accordance with authoritarian theory, there was no political life apart from sham constitutional activities in a few small and medium size states. After 1850 politics never again disappeared from the German consciousness. However narrow and illiberal the 'dictated' Prussian constitution was on paper, it provided the basis for serious political battles, and there were developments for which there had been no provision made in the constitution. Nor did Austria return to the calm of Metternich's day. Before 1848 it had been a great historical fact

questioned by no one; after 1848 the Austrian state perpetually redefined, examined and rejected itself, like a sick man tossing on his bed in search of a more comfortable position. A sickness of the state, never cured, always treated with new remedies or hopelessly abandoned to its own law – that is the history of the long reign of the Emperor Francis Joseph (1848–1916).

Political innocence was lost and with it a good deal of the idealism which had made itself heard with jubilant self-assurance in the spring of 1848. Now it was the turn of realism, though not only as the result of 1848. A revolution achieves much less than is often thought. It is merely an expression, a sudden explosive focusing of certain tendencies of the period. And some things that found expression in 1848 were then already out of date. Intelligent French observers noted even in the thirties that in politics, and also in literature and philosophy, Germany was increasingly attracted by realism and materialism. Shortly before 1848 the Prussian writer and diplomat Varnhagen von Ense noted in his diary the following striking remark made by an acquaintance:

In the capital there is as yet little sign of it but in the commercial and provincial towns a generation is growing up which is oblivious of, or even hostile to, all idealistic endeavour, which rushes headlong towards brutal reality and which will soon accept nothing that is not concerned with material needs and pleasures.

It was not in 1848 but in the fifties and sixties that this generation came into its own. It made Germany into an industrial state; and for it, in line with its ideas, was founded the Empire whose character differed so substantially from the vision of the best of the men of 1848.

Part Five

Restoration Again (1849–1862)

How did the intelligent German of the fifties see the world, Europe, his country? Let us take at random a writer who reached his full intellectual stature in those years, the Prussian historian Johann Gustav Droysen. He published an article in June 1854 when the two western powers and Russia were involved in a war in the Crimean peninsula which was prevented from spreading and becoming a European war by Germany's neutrality. Droysen argues that the Crimean War, the 'European crisis' as he calls it, was not caused by any fundamental, insurmountable difference between Britain and Russia, neither of which wanted the war. The man who wanted it was the Emperor Napoleon III who reigned in Paris and kept Europe in turmoil. Who was he? He was an adventurer, eager to destroy the European system of 1815 and therefore to humble the power which had always been the mainstay of that system, Russia. 'The Emperor of the French is like a gambler at the faro table; he always stakes his whole winnings; one more lucky throw and he will have broken the bank.' His throne was the only concrete evidence that remained of the Revolution of 1848. 'Everywhere else in Europe reaction has been victorious, only in France has the revolution taken a positive turn.' Let the old monarchies welcome Bonaparte as the tamer of the revolution, let him copy their methods of government – he could never completely deny the democratic basis of his authority. The good old days which the reactionaries dreamt of restoring were gone forever. Moreover, Napoleon was an unreliable ally; having humiliated Russia he would offer it peace and stir up new trouble in company with yesterday's enemy.

Let the European states not over-estimate themselves; they

had shrunk. At the beginning of the sixteenth century a European system of states had developed, in opposition to the old small-scale Italian system; likewise a system of world states was now developing, compared with which Europe would be what Florence, Milan and Venice had then been to Spain, France and Britain. There was 'rapidly growing democratic North America', 'vast continental Russia with its caesarian absolutism', and the British Empire; soon there would be China. In future those giants would fight for control of the earth. 'It is already discernible that there is a much deeper contrast between North America and Russia and between China and Britain than between the crumbling nations and states of old Europe.' Britain was aware of that development and therefore moved cautiously. Its position as a world power did not allow it to become engrossed in Europe.

Where under such new conditions stood 'our poor, tired, much divided Germany'? It was not a European power, let alone a world power. In the greatest crisis of modern history it was led, advised and represented by Austria, a state which, though recently galvanized into audacity, could never come adequately to terms with the new historical forces. Prussia, subordinate to Austria, was also ruled by the party of static reaction. But a common conservative policy was not in the interest of the nation, not even really in the interest of Prussia, which alone could give the nation up-to-date leadership. What was required was not the realization of abstract theories of equality and Jacobin rule but the establishment of an independent Germany and the creation of 'something healthy, real and promising from the tremendous changes described above, from the profound social and intellectual ferment which now affects Europe like a fever'. That could only be done by the Protestant German spirit, and, to the extent that an external agent was required, by the 'healthy authority' of the Prussian state; therefore Prussia must lead Germany.

If great changes had taken place in the political sphere, even more profound and revolutionary ones had occurred in social and intellectual life. The old European civilization based on a subsistence economy, handicrafts and feudalism had gone.

While industry had destroyed the independent artisans, the state had destroyed the old self-sufficient social units. Whereas once the state had been the embodiment of law and order, it had now become a mechanism for the creation of ever more power. It no longer needed people of independent education, it needed technically trained servants, and the spirit of the age ensured that they would be forthcoming. As a result of the triumphs of the natural sciences their methods were applied everywhere. Old beliefs were disappearing and only positive achievement counted.

Our spiritual life is deteriorating rapidly; its dignity, its idealism, its intellectual integrity are vanishing . . . Meanwhile the exact sciences grow in popularity; establishments flourish whose pupils will one day form the independent upper middle class as farmers, industrialists, merchants, technicians and so on; their education and outlook will concentrate wholly on material issues. At the same time the universities are declining . . . At present all is instability, chaos, ferment and disorder. The old values are finished, debased, rotten, beyond salvation and the new ones are as yet unformed, aimless, confused, merely destructive . . . we live in one of the great crises that lead from one epoch of history to the next, a crisis comparable to that of the crusades on which the knights-errant embarked in the struggle for the Holy Sepulchre, or of the age of the Reformation when America appeared upon the horizon of history.

Droysen thought that it was useless to bemoan such a development or want to delay or undo it. That was the mistake that European reaction had made in Berlin no less than in Vienna and St Petersburg. These changes were historical facts, and what was a fact was right and what was historically right had power, indeed, invincible power. Resistance was pointless. Did it follow that the radical democrats and socialists were right? Not necessarily, because there were opportunist adventurers who swam with the tide. However, to swim against the tide of history was impossible. One must co-operate by trying to shape the new forces, by preserving the link between past and future, by saving the things that were worth preserving.

Such were Johann Gustav Droysen's views in 1854. He belonged to a group of moderate liberal historians who wanted to

see the establishment of a 'little' Germany led by Prussia and a reconciliation of Prussia with the modern age, thus placing themselves at the service of a cause soon to be victorious. Droysen was no genius and no prophet, but just a politically minded professor. But what he discussed in his article in 1854, were the historical themes of the fifties, the exploits of Napoleon III, the conflict between Russia and the West, and the reshaping of Italy; later came the theme of the sixties, Prussia's 'great successes'; and finally the theme of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, compared with which all purely European events pale into insignificance: the development of 'world states' and the decline of Europe as the centre of world power. Although this development was debated as early as 1850 it was lost sight of in the age of imperialism and German glory. Then there was the transformation of society, the growing omnipotence of the state, the disappearance of old religious traditions, the anarchy of values – phenomena that were to be talked about for the next hundred years. The 'crisis of modern man' goes back a long way. An age which in retrospect seems unexciting, reactionary, bourgeois and boring – Nietzsche later speaks of the 'miasma of the fifties' – was regarded by those who lived through it as a chaotic period of transition, as an anarchistic no-man's-land between yesterday and tomorrow.

1. Years of Reaction

The European reaction of which Droysen speaks lasted only a few years. In Europe something unexpected always happens to change existing conditions. It is unimaginable until it occurs, just as it is impossible to believe during bad weather that the sun will shine again; but it is certain to happen. Moreover, the post-revolutionary years were years of prosperity and growing industrialization which brought changes in every sphere of life, as none knew better than Karl Marx: changes in the structure of

society, in education, in diplomacy, in war and sooner or later also in domestic policy. The fifties were a time of technical and industrial advance. In ten years the production of pig iron in the Rhineland quintupled and the output of coal trebled; the building of railways and ships also made rapid progress. The Siemens brothers laid the cornerstone of a German electrical industry and the first big banks were founded. Visitors to the Great Exhibition of 1851 in London saw the marvels of the new technical science, which, the Prince Consort said in his opening address, would lead to new, happier statesmanship and to an international community of states. How could the nations of the world remain ignorant of each other in the age of the steamship, or dangerously misunderstand each other in the age of the electric telegraph?

Eighteen fifty-one was also the year of the *coup d'état* by which President Bonaparte made himself dictator of France on the way to fulfilling shortly afterwards the dream of his youth by assuming the title of Emperor. The historian de Tocqueville, a good observer, commented that the world was a curious stage, and that a mediocre man could achieve apparently great things provided the concatenation of circumstances was right. In his brilliant political pamphlet, *Der 18. Brumaire des Louis Bonaparte*, Karl Marx explained the dictator's rise in terms of the class struggle. The bourgeoisie, no longer able to control the workers within the framework of its liberal institutions, had resigned politically and yielded to the demagogic impostor who protected it, though at a high price. Similarly, in good Marxist and Hegelian terms, the young Ferdinand Lassalle wrote: 'In their death throes the bourgeois government and private enterprise find a common denominator in military despotism and tyranny. While his uncle, with whom he confuses himself, had an outstanding revolutionary mission, this fool is nothing but the empty symbol of the dying reaction.' For the time being the 'fool' remained in power; had he been told that he was only kept by the bourgeoisie in order to postpone the social revolution he would not have understood what was meant. Fêted as the 'saviour of order' he also wanted to be fêted as Emperor of the peasants and the workers, as liberator of the Italians and, if it was possible without too

much risk, of the Poles. The character of such a talented adventurer, splendour-loving sensualist, enthusiast, dreamer and fanatic eludes summing up. He came to the fore in the heyday of European reaction and desperately wanted to be accepted as an equal by the kings of Europe. A Prussian reactionary called von Bismarck said that in his heart of hearts Napoleon III gave him an unadmitted feeling of satisfaction. At the same time Napoleon was a product of the revolution – that was how Droysen saw him – the man who stood for universal suffrage, plebiscites and national liberation. Above all he stood for unrest, however much he wanted to enjoy a hedonist existence in his castles. Having been a conspirator in his youth he could not cease to be a conspirator as a crowned head. His eyes, which General Moltke described as ‘lifeless’, were for ever looking for opportunities to change the map of Europe, to collect triumphs and to solve unresolved problems. He needed prestige and needed to be talked about by the world. France and its new master were indeed talked about; once again France more than any other was the power which Germany watched, which set the tone in politics, as in the arts and in fashion.

Louis Napoleon’s first aim was to destroy the understanding which had existed intermittently since 1813 between Russia, Austria and Prussia, the ‘Holy Alliance’ and thus to end Russia’s semi-dictatorship over Europe – by no means a reactionary aim.

The Austrian Empire started by trying out a system not unlike the Napoleonic one: modern dictatorship, unconcerned with tradition and prejudice. Until his sudden death in the spring of 1852 Felix Schwarzenberg ruled under the nominal sovereignty of the young Francis Joseph. Like Louis Napoleon the aristocratic Schwarzenberg was an adventurer, who despised his equals and who chose curious collaborators: a Rhenish wholesale merchant who built the harbour of Trieste, Baron Bruck, and a revolutionary lawyer from Vienna, Alexander Bach. The three men tried to unify the Habsburg territories politically and, more important, economically. Hungary was forced into the Austrian customs system. The abrogation in December 1851, a few days after Napoleon’s *coup*, of the constitution decreed in

1848 meant nothing in itself; the constitution had always existed on paper only. However, the active participation of the middle classes, particularly of the Austrian Germans, was needed to realize Bruck's great plan, adopted by Schwarzenberg, to make the whole of Austria part of the German *Zollverein* and create an economic unit of seventy million people. The plan was remarkable. Bruck even visualized the affiliation of Switzerland, Belgium and Denmark to such a system, saw German industry penetrating down the Danube far into the Ottoman Empire and dreamt of a second America arising in central Europe. Schwarzenberg was less interested in economic problems; the project appealed to him because it was likely to curtail Prussia's position of pre-eminence. For that very reason it did not materialize – because it ignored politics. The empire of all the Germans – and indeed much more than that – could not be reached by the back door. Europe was not prepared casually to accept such a vast concentration of power, nor were the central German states willing to become buried in it. If previously they had relied on Austria against Prussia, they now relied on Prussia against Austria. It has been Europe's greatness and its curse that its states have been determined to dominate each other. A central Europe, united economically from Hamburg to the mouth of the Danube, was a desirable objective and would have ensured better living standards for the Germans as well as for many non-Germans. But in whose interest would such a union have operated? What powers would have had reason to feel threatened by it? Austria would have benefited, whereas Prussia, and also Russia and France, would have been threatened. The empire of seventy millions did not come about and Prussia remained master of the German *Zollverein*.

After Schwarzenberg's death and Bruck's resignation Austria relapsed into an absolutism which differed from that of Metternich's only in that it was somewhat more effective. The Emperor was his own first minister, the semblance of parliamentary representation was regarded as superfluous and the country was governed by the civil service. The Concordat which Austria reached with the Catholic Church did not make Austria more

attractive to Protestant Germany. It gave the church rights which it had not had since the seventeenth century, including almost complete control of education, literary censorship and its own legal system – and that at the moment when Pius IX opened his great campaign against ‘liberalism, progress and modern civilization’. The unmitigated reaction that reigned in Austria was unlikely to win the future. In 1849 Austria had first subdued the disruptive elements within its own territory and then Prussia. Yet it did not exploit its success. Was it unable to do so? Was the empire of many nations, in spite of all that could be said for it, kept together in a manner that prevented creative action in Germany?

2. Reaction in Prussia

Reaction also reigned in Prussia, though that country possessed what Austria no longer pretended to have after 1852, a ‘constitution’ which on paper did not look too bad. The reality, however, was different. A paper constitution is not a mere nothing. It can become something if the forces that wish it to do so are strong enough; much depends on its wording, and on its provisions. But a canal without water is useless and falls to ruin. Ferdinand Lassalle once said: ‘Basically constitutional questions are not questions of law but of power; a country’s real constitution exists only in the actual prevailing political conditions. Written constitutions are only of value and permanence if they exactly express the existing distribution of power in society.’ The distribution of power in Prussia was such that the minorities, the civil servants, the army, the landowners and above them all the dynasty, which had always regarded the Prussian state as its property, were able to exert an influence not provided for in the constitution and entirely unrelated to the numerical or economic importance of these groups.

Suffrage was universal, but indirect and neither secret nor

equal. According to the amount of tax paid the population was divided into three classes whose votes had equal weight, so that a thousand rich men counted for as much as a hundred thousand poor men. The principle that votes should not only be counted but weighed may be worth thinking about; several other criteria of selection were suggested on this occasion, such as professional achievement, distinction between married and unmarried men and so on. The Prussian three-class electoral system was simply plutocratic, for it gave more votes to those with more money, more to the successful brothel-keeper than to the doctor and the teacher. The result, more than anything a consequence of the general discouragement, was the reactionary and subservient character of the Prussian parliament in the fifties. It did what was asked of it, whenever the government did not choose to employ 'administrative means'. The noblest 'March achievements' were watered down or done away with: freedom of the press, freedom of association and assembly, the National Guard and ministerial responsibility. The First Chamber, intended to be a kind of Senate, was replaced by the *Herrenhaus*, a copy of the House of Lords, composed of the heads of the great aristocratic families and of persons nominated by the monarch. The constitution provided for a division of power, the consent of the King and of the two chambers being required for legislation; when it came to the real division of power everyone took as much as he could, in accordance with his courage, self-confidence and determination.

The greatest determination to have power was displayed by the Junkers, the old-established landowners from the eastern part of the kingdom. They achieved their aim less by party rule – it could not be said of any parliamentary party that it was in power – than by more direct methods, by their standing in the countryside, their position in the army and the civil service, and their influence at Court. They knew how to assert themselves, having always had what the middle class so far lacked completely, an instinct for power. They also knew that they were threatened, that time was working against them, and that attack was the best defence. It is wrong entirely to condemn any class of human beings. The world is not a just place and when just men reach the

top they are usually not as just as they promised to be while they were oppressed. Among the Junkers there were rebels against their own class, decent men who struggled for their economic existence and whose homes in the countryside were centres of genuine Lutheran influence. But by and large, as a class, and particularly as a ruling class, the Junkers were selfish and inadequate. Their interests were too narrow to be identified with those of the state. They were too poor to be the ruling class and had to use various forms of pressure as a substitute for economic power. Most of Germany, even of Prussia, was foreign to them; they knew nothing of the Rhineland or the Catholic regions. They were not a German aristocracy in the sense that the English aristocracy was English; they were a regional class without vision whose only interest in wanting to control the whole country was self-preservation. In 1848 an abyss had opened in front of them and although they had escaped from it the experience had made them even more stubborn, even bolder.

There was also a German nobility which, since Prussia was a large part of Germany, was also to be found in the new Prussia, in the west and in Silesia. Its members were a different race of men; some of them were so rich that they had no economic worries and left the administration of their estates to revenue offices. Those who disliked complete idleness went into politics, the diplomatic service and more recently, parliament. Their estates were scattered over various German states and they could choose their nationality without feeling special loyalty to Prussia or Baden. They were therefore national in outlook, just as in the bourgeoisie were the professors who moved from one university to another. They regarded the ruling dynasties as their equals because their own houses had reigned until they had been robbed of their dwarf states fifty years previously. Among these families were men of intelligence and education, of wide horizons, ambition and good will; the Leiningens, Hohenlohes and Fürstenbergs stand out in the history of Prussia and of Germany in this period. But these aristocrats cannot be called a ruling class; they were too spoilt and too uncommitted. They had few convictions and lived in a cultivated no-man's-land, neither

bourgeois nor Junker, neither kings nor vassals. Moreover, they were few in number.

One legacy of the revolution was the political parties which appeared as organized groups in parliament. The conservatives were overwhelmingly in the majority. The moderate liberals who, in the National Assembly of 1848, had sat on the extreme right now sat on the extreme left. Between the two there was a special 'Catholic group' which, by safeguarding the interests of its co-religionists, achieved good results in this predominantly Protestant state. Later it called itself the Centre Party.

For the moment the struggle between these groups was not very serious. There were fights, discussions and intrigues, but less between the parliamentary parties than between the various cliques who had the ear of the King, the government, the 'Camerilla', the bureaucrats, the arch-reactionaries and the semi-liberals, the men who thought only about Prussia and those who thought about Prussia in relation to Germany, the climbers and the doctrinaires. Almost everybody was against everybody else; Prince William was against his brother the King, the leader of the Conservative Party was against the conservative Prime Minister, the envoy to the Federal Diet in Frankfurt was against the envoy in London and the Junkers were against the strict but honest chief of police of Berlin.

Ranke said, and it is often maintained today, that foreign policy must be formulated by independent experts and that a parliamentary government, pushed about by parties and electorates, is unfitted for this important task. Such a view can certainly be justified, but so can the reverse. The government of Frederick William IV had, as far as its own people was concerned, a free hand in foreign policy; there was no interference from parliament or fickle popular opinion, and there was no lack of trained advisers. But when it came to making a decision, the various proposals, intrigues and fantasies between which the King could not make up his mind cancelled each other out. The result was that the factious parliament could not have done worse.

3. *The Crimean War*

The Crimean War brought the first serious test of this system or lack of system. It was the strangest of all nineteenth-century wars, a repressed world war and yet strictly localized, a never-ending, confused diplomatic game, underlined by occasional battles. It resulted from hidden, unadmitted causes and silly incidents; the aims behind it were fantastic or non-existent.

Britain and France fought allegedly to save the Turkish Empire and to drive Russia out of the Danubian countries, out of Rumania. Britain wanted to preserve the balance of power and restrict Russian expansion. Louis Napoleon on the other hand wanted to disturb the balance of power, to wage a popular war against the Tsar, to find new opportunities for action, and later to make common cause with a weakened Russia which had learnt its lesson. The German powers found themselves between the belligerents. Austria's position was that it could not at any price accept a Russian advance on the lower Danube, but was afraid of a war with Russia in which it bore the brunt in Galicia while Prussia was free to do what it wished in Germany. On the other hand Austria was afraid of making an enemy of France because it could not maintain its position in northern Italy against the will of France. Austria occupied too many vulnerable positions, in Italy, in Germany and in the South-East. The mobilization of its army in Galicia was decisive for the war because it prevented Russia from sending its main force to the Crimea. Austria compelled Russia to evacuate the Danubian principalities, into which it moved its own troops; under the peace treaty, however, Austria was not allowed to keep Rumania because Austria had done nothing in the war and because of its completely uncompromising attitude towards Italian nationalism. In Prussia there was a reactionary and definitely pro-Russian party and a liberal and definitely pro-British party, both of which tried to influence the King; there were also a number of outsiders and rebels who wanted to use the opportunity to extend Prussia's sphere of power in Germany, who strove towards a Franco-

Prussian-Russian alliance even as the French and the Russians were killing each other in the Crimea. There is no need to go into the intricacies of the various moves and counter-moves; the up-shot was more fortunate than might have been expected from such a profusion of effort. Prussia remained neutral, but unlike Austria, which fell out with everybody, particularly with Russia, Prussia remained friendly with everybody, particularly with Russia, which it supplied with war material to the advantage of Prussian businessmen. Prussia seemed insecure, excited, almost non-existent during the Crimean War; yet undeservedly it gained more from the war than the victors. Liberated from Russian tutelage, it ceased to be the junior partner in the 'Holy Alliance' of the eastern powers, now dead and buried. Russia's industrial, military and moral weakness was revealed to all the world during the war; the Tsar could no longer usurp the role of arbitrator as he had done in 1851. The most important abiding consequence of the Crimean War was the fact that developments in Europe hitherto prevented by the more terrible presence of Russia now became possible. The direct results of the war, on the other hand, were ephemeral and the wickedness of the political game is revealed by the fact that half a million young men died for such ends. The Sultan was made to promise to adopt more modern methods of government. Rumania became independent – a status which it preserved for about eighty years; the Russians were not allowed to keep a navy in the Black Sea, which was 'neutralized'. Such compulsory disarmament, however, never survives the situation in which it is dictated.

The Crimean War, revealing the decline of Europe's most reactionary great power, created the conditions for new activity a mere five years after the failure of the revolution of 1848. It signified the end of that fleeting episode, the 'second Restoration'; the almost uninterrupted trial of strength between peoples, states, classes and ideas was resumed.

4. State and Nation in Germany

To speak of states as though they were individuals – to say ‘Austria felt itself threatened’, ‘Prussia missed its chance’ and so on – is excusable because it would be clumsy to say each time ‘the diplomats responsible for the foreign policy of the Prussian state’. Sometimes historians help themselves by referring to the address of the foreign ministry of the country concerned and speak of the *Ballhausplatz*, the *Wilhelmstrasse* or the *Quai d’Orsay* as of living beings. Such shorthand, however, has more than a purely practical purpose; it draws attention to the fact that states are more than just organizations of men for certain purposes. They are traditions of power, of success and triumph – over other states – of competition, threat and counter-threat, of gain or loss; traditions, the reality of which cannot be refuted by saying that they exist only in the men’s mind. Of course they exist there alone and yet 500,000 Russians, Frenchmen, Britons and Piedmontese gave their lives in the Crimea for this fictitious reality.

What was Prussia? It was more than a big slice of Poland or of the Rhineland; it was an innate, permanent determination to rule and to expand. The will was particularly strong among certain classes and groups, in the dynasty, the officer corps, the Junkers, the higher civil service and the Protestant state church. Material interests were involved because these groups prospered if ‘Prussia’ prospered; yet it would be wrong to think that ‘Prussia’ was merely a cover-up for material interests; human beings are not made like that. Many men gladly gave their lives for the glory and honour of Prussia; and if the Prussian Minister to the Frankfurt parliament, von Bismarck, had ‘bilious attacks’ over a minor Prussian reverse, this was not because of any threat to his own economic interests or those of his class but because he had Prussia’s ‘glory’ at heart. What was true of Prussia was also true of Austria, with the difference that Austria’s determination to exist depended even more strongly on the ruling family. Prussia had at least a name, though one that happened to be

borrowed from its eastern-most province and an exterminated heathen tribe. Austria had not even a name; it could most appropriately have been called 'the lands of the House of Austria'. Whereas the Hohenzollern family served 'Prussia', the Habsburgs served the glory of their House. Whereas Prussia ruled parts of only two peoples, Germans and Poles, Austria ruled innumerable peoples. But even in Austria it was not the House of Habsburg alone which kept the country together; in 1848 when the dynasty was prepared to surrender, a handful of feudal soldiers kept the Empire together, fundamentally on their own authority.

Such gods are not immortal, although in their lifetime their high priests must claim them to be so. The fact that neither Prussia nor the Austrian Empire exists today makes our story more difficult. We speak of two states which for years polarized the energies of the German nation, which competed with each other, went to war against each other, became allies, fell out again but finally vanished into thin air. It requires imagination to see Prussia and Austria as they once were, because they are no more. Even the pompous monuments of stone, the palaces and statues, which they erected to themselves have mostly been razed to the ground. Yet there were centuries when the Tsars of Russia regarded the kings of Prussia as their equals, and a king of Prussia once forced a coalition of Russia, Austria and France to make peace. We must consider Austria and Prussia - what they were like, how they defended themselves and how they attacked, how one grew and the other shrank, and how both finally disappeared - because though our narrative is concerned with Germans and not with dynastic states both Austria and Prussia occupied or controlled large parts of Germany.

Both had omitted to identify themselves in time - in the eighteenth, the seventeenth, the sixteenth century, or even earlier - with a nation. To start with, France and Spain had also been dynasties rather than nations; the House of Spain had ruled over a galaxy of kingdoms in the Old and the New World. Within the framework which the dynasties provided and were busy enlarging, the Spanish and the French nations had gradually

emerged. The dynastic state became the nation state long before there was any political theory on the subject. As dynasties changed or were driven out, there remained their determination to rule, transformed into a determination to become a state; thus France still exists today. Neither Austria nor Prussia could identify itself with Germany, if only because it was impossible for both of them to do so and one prevented the other from so doing. Added to this, Austria, given its structure, could not want to identify itself with Germany only; and Prussia too, for most of the time, wanted to remain what it was. Moreover, many smaller states, Bavaria, Saxony, Hanover and so on, were opposed to the identification of Prussia or Austria with Germany. Nevertheless, there was a German nation; the fact had emerged in 1848, in 1814 and even earlier, in Luther's time. But the German states did not serve any nation: the nation had no state.

A state might of course create a nation, even where the state combined several nationalities and linguistic regions within its frontiers. This happened in Switzerland and was happening there at this very time, as the Swiss under their new, democratic constitution developed more firmly than ever into a separate and united nation. But Switzerland was a unique case, because it had always been a free, balanced federation, without expansionist ambitions. In the past such inclinations had been harboured by some of its member states, particularly by Berne, but never by the Confederation. Switzerland did not conquer or annex, it admitted; and a country which wanted to become Swiss could be refused admission to the Confederation. Switzerland had no dynasty, no ruler and subjects, only confederates. What Kant had expected from all republics came true for once: the Swiss only wanted to be left in peace and did not want to disturb the peace of others. By adopting this attitude they became a nation with distinct characteristics. The more insistent the call for the unification of all Germans became across the border the more consciously and speedily did the Swiss abandon the remains of their German origins.

The call was loud and strong, although it is impossible to say how many people wanted a German nation state and how many

viewed this objective with indifference or hostility. Decisive historical achievements have often been accomplished by minorities, without or even against the will of the majority; once they have been accomplished and tested by history, it is easy for the legend to arise that almost everybody but a few traitors had wanted what had happened. This is true for example of the American Revolution. Political movements are likely to be led and stimulated by minorities because most people are usually absorbed in their own problems. To say this is not to pass judgement on the historic justification of such movements. Before so judging one must inquire if there were other people who had good reasons for wanting something different and who suffered violence at the hands of the victors. Did most Americans in 1776 passionately want to remain British subjects, and if so was it possible for their wish to be fulfilled? If it is impossible to answer this question in the affirmative the making of the American Revolution by a minority is no less of an achievement.

In Germany there was a very strong minority which wanted a nation state. How this was to be achieved, what form it should take and what its frontiers should be were hotly debated questions, but there was general agreement on the need for reform of the 'Confederation'. Therefore there was a complicated contest of wills between Prussia and Austria and also between each of these two states and the as yet only partially unified Germany. The smaller states were of no importance in this connection because they could offer no resistance.

Although there were more non-Prussians and non-Austrians in the German Confederation than Austrians and Prussians – about eighteen million compared with about fourteen million Prussians and fourteen million Austrians – their states were too small and too scattered to exert any political pressure. The idea that there must be a 'third', 'pure' Germany to offset the two German-Slav powers appeared again and again at this time without ever becoming a reality. The small states could neither direct the course of events in Germany nor successfully oppose it; they could only let themselves be swept reluctantly along. Even the most respectable among them, Bavaria, was passive.

Political awareness did exist in Bavaria; it was old and tenacious. With roots in the countryside, in the tribal origin of the population and in the religious faith of Old Bavaria, it was less dependent on the dynasty than in Prussia or in Austria, although it had close links with the House of Wittelsbach. This awareness was, as we know, strong enough to weather the worst storms and after a long night suddenly to be present again as though nothing had happened. It was not sufficiently strong politically, however, to prevail against Austria and Prussia, and not sufficiently strong morally to sever the fate of Bavaria from that of Germany. Personally the kings of Bavaria, Ludwig I and Maximilian II, were particularly unsuited to take such a step because of the tremendous enthusiasm with which they stressed the fact that they were Germans. Bavaria took the same road as Germany, then as always, and could do almost nothing to determine where it should lead.

The German states were also by now economically completely dependent on the German *Zollverein* and its leading member. They did not appreciate this fact themselves because conservative diplomacy always treated economic issues as of third-rate importance. But the truth emerged with great force in every political crisis.

This is not to say that the German states had no genuine existence. Although the nation had no overall capital, the country was studded with the capitals of the different states, which engaged in cultural and academic competition. They were eclectic in their styles, copying the Italian Renaissance, French Rococo and Empire, and Greek antiquity, but unique in their chequered abundance, and their influence on the sense of form of those who lived in them was to the good. Now that little of this remains, and that the German tribes have been thrown together and towns have come to resemble each other as much as American towns, we can look back and evaluate the wealth that Germany has lost. The administration of these states was as varied as their size, from Bavaria to the comic opera courts of Thuringia. In some, as in Hesse-Cassel, terrible things occurred periodically; in others, as in Baden, which had presented such an unhappy

spectacle in 1849, successful administrative reform led to a greater degree of local self-government. There is much to be said against German particularism, but also much in its favour. It was Germany's original political and cultural creation, but time worked against it. When the chronicler comes to historical decisions he must speak of Vienna and Berlin, not of Altenburg or Karlsruhe, or even of Munich, Dresden or Stuttgart.

5. Ideas at Work

Political thought progressed even though reaction reigned supreme almost everywhere in Europe. The age was so much concerned with intellectual justification that even reaction clothed itself in a variety of high-sounding theories which it presented in parliaments, newspapers and learned books.

The chief social factor from the middle of the century onwards was the increasingly intensive development of industry; the chief political factor was at first the unwillingness of the pre-industrial powers to allow the middle class to play the role in public life which corresponded to its growing wealth. The game of the old powers was made easier by the terror of the middle classes of 'red revolution', by the pressure of the working class whose numbers and influence increased as the middle classes grew wealthier. So far the Marxist analysis was correct. The theory of the old powers was conservative, that of the middle classes liberal, and that of the working class – so far as it possessed a theory distinct from that of the progressive middle classes – socialist.

In reality the situation was more complex. There was antagonism not only between social classes but also between states and nations, particularly between those nations which had not yet become states; there was also religious antagonism. Then there were the ideas of those who wanted to reconcile points of difference and to create something great and constructive

above them. Such ideas could be powerful or weak, honest or dishonest.

As for the unceasing, silent struggle between states, the German rulers comforted themselves for a while yet with the belief that political and social differences coincided. The three eastern monarchies, Russia, Austria and Prussia, were the conservative states and had to be united in a natural alliance because they thought alike. The France of Napoleon III was the revolutionary state which the conservatives must oppose. Britain was difficult to place in this system but in practice leant more towards France than towards the Holy Alliance. Actually there was a mistake in the calculation. During the Crimean War it became clear that the rivalry between Austria and Russia in the Balkans counted for more than the anti-liberal views shared by the young Francis Joseph and the old Nicholas; and that was the end of the alliance of conservative powers. A little later the Tsar was not ashamed, out of sheer spite against Austria, to co-operate diplomatically with the French Emperor. Anyway all was not as it should have been with the revolutionary character of Napoleon's government. He was a believer in plebiscites, the 'chosen of the seven million', as he liked to call himself, a usurper, heir to the first Napoleon and the revolutionary chaos from which the latter had emerged. But he was also a believer in order, in social peace and authority, protected by a modern army and bureaucracy; an attitude which did not at all displease the conservatives. How could they consistently oppose a ruler who was generally hated by the liberals for destroying parliamentary freedom and self-determination, loathed by the great spokesman of socialism, Karl Marx, and who was proving such a diligent ally of the Catholic Church that the Pope was not above becoming godfather to the imperial son? At times Bonaparte appeared almost as the incarnation of the conservative cause. If only he had not then proceeded to form an alliance with his arch-enemies, the liberals, as he was to do shortly afterwards in Italy. The unfortunate truth for anyone who attached importance to the ideal order of things was that reality never quite lived up to the ideal. The case of the opportunist dreamer in Paris was an extreme one; believ-

ing himself to be above classes and 'isms' he was free to move in two opposite directions at once. This happened everywhere, ideas might claim to shape reality, but reality failed to obey.

It was in these years that Pope Pius IX marshalled the forces of his church for a crusade against the spirit of the age, timing the climax of this campaign for the sixties. As the threat to the authority of the church appeared to grow this prince became more uncompromising. There was to be no reconciliation of the church 'with progress, with liberalism, with modern civilization'. That was the spiritual climate which produced dogmas such as the Immaculate Conception and later Papal Infallibility. It was an attitude of defiance, of uncompromising struggle against almost all the dominant forces of the second half of the century. Given Pius IX's support of the Italian princes and the House of Habsburg it must be said that the policy of the Roman Church was 'reactionary', if that word has any meaning at all. This, however, does not tell us everything about Catholicism in that period. During the years of revolution the liberals and the representatives of church interests in Germany had formed some kind of alliance because both wanted to be rid of the tutelage of the princes. The alliance was the result of the political situation of the moment, and would certainly have broken up if the liberals had come to power. More significant and less dependent on day-to-day politics was the attempt of some Catholic thinkers and organizers to achieve contact with the people and to broaden the social foundations of the church. Whereas the liberal principle was each man for himself, the church taught the concept of a community of Christians, and in the treasure-house of its tradition found plenty to relieve the inadequacies of an increasingly industrial civilization. In many places Catholic societies were founded, such as the organization of Catholic apprentices established by Adolf Kolping and Wilhelm Ketteler, who became Bishop of Mainz in 1850; this organization combined material care of the sick and the old with Christian education. The movement must not be called a failure merely because it was later supplanted by one of a different character. One witness to the fact that the Catholic craftsmen's societies did much good for

their members was the turner-apprentice, August Bebel, who in the fifties in Freiburg and Salzburg belonged to one of them. When all is said and done, practical assistance is better than clever theory.

One of the theorists was the political philosopher Julius Stahl, who in the fifties led the conservatives in the Upper House in Berlin. Although this man is reputed to have had considerable influence events would have taken the same course had he not lived. He confined himself to reflection, but what he said was intelligent, perceptive and well expressed. Intellect was held in so much respect that even the uncouth Junkers fighting for their material interests chose as their spokesman a learned writer who into the bargain was a baptized Jew from southern Germany, a cultivated, refined and upright little man. Stahl found some truth in most attitudes, half-truths which he tried to fuse into a higher general truth. It seemed to him that this higher truth had materialized in the Prussian monarchy. The fact that this monarchy was not absolutist was good, and the fact that it was not parliamentary either was also good, nor must it become parliamentary. It was limited by tradition, custom and Christian faith. To have different classes was desirable, but the strong authority above them must be that of the state. Freedom, safeguarded by authority and law, was also desirable, but it must not presume to change arbitrarily the historic, natural, God-given order of society. However, Stahl did not rule out reform; 'false reaction' was almost as reprehensible as revolution and democracy. Above all the state must be Christian, a divine and human realm. 'Our political and our religious attitude are inseparable; it is impossible to be conservative in the state and destructive in the church, impossible to be both for the order that comes from God and against the faith that comes from God. Despite all gradations there are only two possible attitudes: one is to support throne and altar undivided, the other to support revolution.' Thus a man must be a Christian and a royalist, or neither; if he was neither he lacked moral purpose and was in danger of stumbling from democracy into nihilism and blackest crime. Stahl was not a great thinker, merely clever at arranging ideas. If history had

stood still and none of the great changes of the nineteenth century had taken place, if the King and his servants and officials, officers and Junkers had been strict moral characters and good Christians Stahl might have been right. As it was, he spoke of a God-given order, loyal subjects and Christian humility while the Prussian Upper House gave a rousing ovation to Herr von Rochow, who during the aftermath of a scandal in a gambling house had shot and killed the Berlin Chief of Police in a duel. Poor philosopher, what a pitiful figure he must have cut at such moments among such allies!

Consistent economic liberalism, the so-called Manchester School, found no important theoretical exponents in Germany. It was obvious that the Prussian capitalists were in favour of complete economic freedom and against the modest legislation initiated by the state in the fifties. Most Prussian entrepreneurs were in favour of free trade with the rest of the world, unlike their south German competitors. But their ideas did not crystallize into a philosophy as in Britain. When the liberal middle class became politically conscious again towards the end of the period of reaction, its main concern was with national-political and constitutional demands and not with economic issues. Industry flourished in the last years of Frederick William IV's reign. If some industrialists were persecuted at the behest of the government, this was not because they belonged to a certain professional class but because they had been too active as liberals during the revolution.

Nevertheless liberal thought in Germany at this period was more original than conservative thought, which lacked all vigour. There are, however, many shades of 'liberalism', and Mill and Spencer would have refused to regard the members of the Prussian school of historians as fellow liberals. That school consisted of a group of professors which first emerged in the late fifties and from then on exerted considerable influence for several decades. Droysen, Haym, Sybel and, the youngest of the group, Heinrich von Treitschke, have real achievements to their credit. They did not make history or engage in politics, that was done by others; but when these others at last appeared on the scene,

and when their game became clear the writings of the liberal professors proved of great assistance. These historians were certainly entitled to be called liberals. They demanded a constitutional state, they hated clerical Austria, the plebiscitary dictatorship of France and German particularism, and since they were not radical revolutionaries the only object of loving hope that remained to them was Prussia. They put their faith in Prussia, though not in reactionary Prussia. To become the nation's leader Prussia must change, and this required the active co-operation of parliament and the progressive parties. To the picture of the old liberals as it was before 1848 these energetic scholars added a certain intellectual or caste arrogance which distinguished them from the democrats. But there were also new features. The founders of the *Preussische Jahrbücher* and the *Historische Zeitschrift* were no longer friends of France. To them events on the other side of the Rhine after 1789 had shown that the French often chose the wrong road. They saw a connection between Latins, Papists, despots, Jacobins and ultra-democrats and rejoiced that all this was alien to the German mind. If there was a country from which they thought that they could learn it was Britain, which was also 'Germanic'. For the rest they wanted the Germans to stop casting admiring glances at other nations and be themselves, whether the world liked it or not. To achieve this objective the Germans needed a national state, ruled by law at home and strong abroad. Whereas law must prevail at home, it was strength which in the end governed the relationship of states, which created and destroyed laws; so the state must be as strong as possible. Its foreign policy must be realistic, must not rely on an opponent's sense of justice and must be free from sentimentality; it must be *Realpolitik* – a word which made its appearance as early as the beginning of the fifties. Freedom, as an obligation and an inspiration, was found only in a state which was the source of all morality, the guardian of education and the protector of the economy. To serve such a state, to find a place in it, was freedom; to pursue only one's personal interest was what Lassalle had called a night watchman's ideal.

These scholars were historians; they were not yet economists,

no longer pure philosophers, but masters of the science of history. Theirs was a logical attitude: history was not the story of theories, of things that should have been, but of facts, of success and failure. The weak went under and the strong remained on top; those who put their faith in justice without strength received the fool's reward. States, institutions, legal concepts and ways of life must be seen historically, as realizations not of general eternal truths but of national characteristics under non-recurring conditions. History moreover showed conclusively that the Prussian state had long wanted to unify and lead the German nation. Those who wanted to make this point had no hesitation in distorting history to satisfy their needs.

What is important is that these historians were energetic and intelligent writers. Anybody can have ideas, but it is the writer's energy – one is almost tempted to say, his physical energy – which gives them force. Courage, strength to believe, imagination and daring are not found in ideas alone but in the development of them in articles, speeches and books. A powerful style will follow naturally because style, energy and intellect all go together. Even Heinrich von Treitschke, the most dogmatic and most prejudiced of the national liberal historians, wrote well. Today the reader is still struck by the strength of Treitschke's faith and anger, and does not find him as blind and unjust as he was later reputed to be.

These historians derived their basic ideas from the past, particularly from Fichte and Hegel, idealistic worshippers of the state, who had also found 'truth' in 'might' and in history. They united state and nation into the nation-state – which Hegel had not done. We must not blame them for taking Germany immensely seriously and for limiting their sphere of interest both as scholars and politicians almost exclusively to Germany, because nationalism was rampant everywhere. French historians too were concerned almost exclusively with the history of France, while Russian historians had recently begun to think themselves out of their wits over the question of what Russia was or was not, or should be. Whereas the Russians copied the Germans and their philosophy, particularly Hegel, who stuck in their throats,

the Germans copied the French. Every nation wanted to be different from its neighbour, and succeeded only in copying his national limitations and introversion. Awareness of the fact that the European peoples were few in number and lived in a small space, and that their fate was therefore a common one, was lost in the process.

6. *Lassalle*

The conservatives too adopted the historical approach and also produced great historians. Their conclusions were different. To them existing institutions were venerable and to be touched only with great prudence just because history had made them as they were. We have said already that an idea needs only a slight twist to become something quite different. The national liberal historians found in history the spur to action. Until now things had always changed, and with the courageous help of those who understood history they would continue to change. They shared with Marx their faith in history, their excited expectation of great historical events. After all it is difficult for contemporaries not to have some thoughts in common.

Another who thought in historical terms was a young socialist and pupil of Marx who reached his full intellectual stature in the early fifties, Ferdinand Lassalle. At that moment socialism was marking time; reaction was too strong and the general discouragement too profound for it to make any outward progress. Marx in London devoted himself to the theoretical studies designed to provide the basis for future action; Engels, a textile manufacturer by occupation, looked after the membership records of the Communist League. A socially minded democrat of a completely different type was active in Berlin in the way in which it was possible to be active there even then: the founder of the German credit and co-operative movement, Schulze-Delitzsch. He was a warm-hearted, active man, very helpful within his limits. In the

writings of theoretical socialists he usually comes off badly because he did not want what they wanted and did not answer the question which they asked. Schulze-Delitzsch was a democratic citizen, not a revolutionary. He did not devote himself to the problem of the new 'fourth class', or did not see it. He was concerned with immediate, modest, practical issues. He knew the small tradesmen, the craftsmen who fell victim to the competition of industry, the careworn housewives and for them he achieved something, by teaching them self-help. Large-scale philosophical and political speculation, on the other hand, he left to those with more talent for it, of whom Lassalle felt himself to be one.

Lassalle was the son of a merchant from Breslau, an ambitious young man, energetic, clever, fearless, of great presence of mind, who never forgot that he was an upstart and who liked to show off. As a schoolboy he wrote in his diary that, looked at in the cold light of day, he was an egoist. 'Had I been born a prince I should be an aristocrat body and soul. But as I am merely middle class I shall be a democrat.' Berlin society spoilt him because of his erudition and his wit; he accepted this with indifference, certain that very different triumphs awaited him in life. In Paris, at the age of twenty-one, he met Heine, who was amazed by Lassalle's talent, wit and determination. In the same year he became involved in the fate of a middle-aged, wealthy woman of high social rank, a Countess Hatzfeldt, who was engaged in a sensational quarrel with her husband. The affair with the Countess decided Lassalle's outward existence and embroiled him in a succession of grotesque scandals and intrigues the like of which no fiction writer could have invented. He became involved in endless lawsuits from which, as the protector of his lady, he emerged as a brilliant and daring speaker in court. He sacrificed years to his curious pursuit and devoted at least as much energy to it as to politics. When at last everything had been won and the Countess's husband had handed over her share of the fortune, Lassalle unexpectedly found himself the recipient of a substantial pension from the grateful Countess. Although he lived well he used his leisure for serious purposes.

At the start of the disturbances of 1848 he was in prison in

Cologne on account of one of the worst of the Hatzfeldt scandals. After his release in August he threw himself into politics. He met Marx and Engels – surrendering to the genius of Marx – and intrigued and planned with them for a democratic republic, as he had made up his mind to do as a boy. In November he went to prison again, as a political agitator. This was lucky for him because he was unable to take part in the second, more dangerous revolution of 1849 and did not have to go into exile, like so many of his democratic and socialist friends. He stayed in Germany, on the Rhine, as one of Marx's viceroys, always ready to help, working for the socialist cause in spite of the reaction and supervision by the authorities. The Düsseldorf police reported that his 'extraordinary intellectual qualities, persuasive eloquence, tireless energy, great determination, wildly left ideas, very wide circle of acquaintances, great practical adroitness and the considerable financial resources of his client' made him one of the most dangerous leaders of the revolutionary party. Nevertheless the highest authorities finally decreed 'that the police will not oppose any further the writer Ferdinand Lassalle's application to take up domicile in Berlin'. Lassalle had a talent for fighting successful battles with the authorities. They, on the other hand, did not want to break the law and therefore decided reluctantly not to pursue even such a notorious enemy of the existing system unless he could be proved to have committed an offence.

Lassalle regarded Marx as his best friend. He helped Marx whenever possible, found him publishers and markets for his articles, and regarded him unreservedly as the intellectual head of the party. Marx, on the other hand, although too good a judge of men not to appreciate Lassalle's talent, fundamentally disliked him for very personal and very impersonal reasons. Whereas Lassalle was happy and easy-going Marx made life very difficult for himself. Lassalle, however great his compassion for the poor, was drawn towards aristocratic society and, as Engels sarcastically remarked, acted the gentleman. Marx received no pension from any rich countess, far from it. Moreover, Lassalle was independent not only materially but also intellectually. Although greatly admiring of Marx, Lassalle did not

follow him blindly and in the fifties he produced more and more ideas at variance with those of the master. This alienated Marx, who had little sympathy for intellectual independence in others. In his letters to Engels he liked to refer to Lassalle as 'that person' or 'that individual'. 'How that individual talks . . .' 'Just look at that pompous person.' Although both started life as Hegelians Lassalle did not undergo Marx's materialistic conversion; he remained an idealist. Quite unlike Marx he believed in free human activity and thought that man shaped history. Like Hegel, and again unlike Marx, he believed in the all-embracing power and duty of the state. For Marx the state was only the 'superstructure' of the social conditions which alone were really worth studying. Lassalle thought it worthwhile to conquer the state politically; therefore he attached decisive importance to universal suffrage. Finally, Lassalle was a socially minded politician and a German patriot in a different way from Marx. It is true that Marx could also on occasions suddenly emphasize the German side of his nature, but his revolutionary thought was international from the beginning and grew more so as he sat in London and interspersed his German letters with scraps of English. He was not interested in the contests of states and nations because he saw the class struggle as the key to all history. Hence his readiness to abandon the Danes or the Czechs to the Germans not because he loved his compatriots but because he despised nationalism. Lassalle lived in Germany and perforce gave his attention to the most important problem of the day, namely nationalism. He was not only a socialist but also a democrat, and democracy and the nation-state seemed almost synonymous at that time. Being more in touch with the strongest trends of the age he was less lonely than Marx; and that was what Marx could not forgive. He could establish contact with elements which for Marx were at best indulging in confused obstruction; and in the last resort Lassalle could even deal with men who, according to the master, were the proletariat's bitterest enemies. Lassalle enjoyed adventure, a pleasure unknown to Marx.

Basically the two men were rivals, a situation which Marx, the older and more eminent, resented. They both fought for justice

and social revolution, to which Marx sacrificed his life. But no political work is completely unselfish and the greater the conception the greater is the ambition devoted to it. Marx was consumed by a tremendous determination to dominate. It was bad enough that he should sit poor and alone in the British Museum while other, smaller minds ruled the world, but this situation was bearable because it could be accounted for by his theory. Here, on the other hand, was someone who had stolen his fire, who had adopted his most important ideas, the theories of surplus value, of the class struggle, of the inevitable revolution and of the proletariat as the class which represented all future interests, and used them in a way not laid down by the master, without even asking his leave. This was against the rules of the game. 'It is well that he is gone,' said Wallenstein when he heard of the death of King Gustavus Adolphus, 'because two cocks cannot crow on the same dunghheap.' Marx may have had similar feelings when Lassalle, not yet forty, was killed in a duel; to the end he was a gentleman, a man of passion, of pride, of tremendous will-power and a Don Quixote.

7. Arthur Schopenhauer

Some men who are at odds with their age show that they belong to it by the extent of their opposition to it. Some are rebels, others want to admonish and others still are eccentrics who obtain learning from ancient books and look quietly with complete detachment at their world, as though they themselves did not belong to it. The philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer belonged to the last category. For a long time nobody took an interest in his writings. When the old gentleman to his great delight suddenly became famous it was because of historical trends which he would have disapproved of if he had been clear about them: post-revolutionary disappointment of the middle class, a temporary lack of interest in politics. These trends helped Schopenhauer

who despised history and politics, though he made no effort to flatter passing moods. He wrote as he had always written, because he was too old, too stubborn and much too convinced of the truth of his ideas to think out new ones. Let people take them or leave them.

He was a great writer. His language was clear and powerful and his thought thrived on living knowledge; even those who cannot accept his basic philosophy will find in his writings a wealth of wisdom and profound and true observation. His interest in philosophy started when he was a young man in the Napoleonic era and his early questions were those of classical German philosophy: what can we know, what is knowledge, what is reality? Basically, however, he was driving at something different. Of the two conceptions which appear even in the title of his main work, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* (The World as Will and Idea), we can ignore the second. The essence of Schopenhauer's metaphysics is not the strange, eternally irrefutable and eternally useless view that reality is only an idea, exists only in the mind of the observer and that there is no existence without thought; it was the idea of the world as will that was important to him. The world as the will to be and to live, which exists in every creature, which in every creature secretly regards itself as the whole, so that there is in fact no such thing as a variety of individuals in space and time although there is a struggle of all against all, a determination to survive at any price at the expense of others; the world as a place in which the choice is to eat or be eaten – that is Schopenhauer's idea. The world is the will to live. But it would be better if this will did not exist, if there was nothing. As there is more pain than pleasure on earth, all satisfaction is merely transitory, creating new desire and new distress, and the agony of the animal being devoured is greater than the enjoyment of the devourer. What is true of animals is also true of men, although man has reason, which the animal lacks. Yet reason too must serve the will and is merely a handmaiden of hunger and sexual instinct. Man too, however high his opinion of himself, is ruled by urges, be they conscious or unconscious. Only in philosophy is there salvation. Only in

philosophy does the will recognize that it is in a bad state, with the result that it turns away from itself and the whole world. But this is a 'matter of grace' and happens rarely, among saints, hermits and ascetics. Most men remain eternally chained to the senselessly turning wheel of the will; they die and are followed by others who are what their predecessors were – will.

This philosophy has been called pessimism after the Latin word *pessimum*. Schopenhauer's world was not the best but the worst possible. He argued that if it were worse than it is, it could not exist, for the will to live would cease. From there 'pessimistic' has found its way into general usage, a word coined by the bourgeois age.

Schopenhauer was also a pessimist as regards history, expecting nothing from it. How could he have expected anything, since according to his philosophy the nature of the world, and man with his desires and vices, always remained the same? If one knows the history of one state one knows the history of all states and all ages, because it is always the same. Even the present, which Droysen described with such excited amazement, could not shake Schopenhauer in his conviction. Although he sent telegrams and travelled in the new railway, he denied that there was anything really new in such technical innovations. Two diametrically opposed views therefore appeared simultaneously in Germany, and both were characteristic. In the fifties it was typically German to think as Droysen and his friends did, to treat history as the Last Judgement, and to hope that the Protestant spirit, Germany and the Prussian state would bring about historic acts of liberation. But Schopenhauer, who scorned the idea of progress, was also a representative of his age and nation who was read with pleasure. He too, the anti-historical, anti-political, pessimistic, metaphysical thinker, touched a hidden string in the German soul, and his greatest pupil, Richard Wagner, became the best loved and probably the most 'German' composer.

It is obvious from what has been said that Schopenhauer was a conservative and disapproved of revolutions. A strong, unquestioned authority was needed to keep man, the beast, in check. Switzerland, he thought, should remain the only republic

in Europe, as a warning example to the other peoples. He witnessed the street fighting in Frankfurt in September 1848 and was delighted by the defeat of the 'scoundrels', the insurgents. He belonged to the middle class and owned a little capital, on the income of which he lived carefully but comfortably and to which he believed that he owed his independence as a writer; he had no need to write to please a government or the public. Every day he lunched in the best hotel, being made to pay double the usual price because of his enormous appetite. He wanted to write only for the educated and spoke with contempt of the average man, the 'factory product of nature'. No wonder that Marx's circle could not stand him after he had become famous in old age. Engels scoffed at the 'mad Dr Schopenhauer', and Franz Mehring in his history of German Social Democracy still calls him a 'philistine rentier'. This hardly goes to the heart of the matter. Schopenhauer had no greater liking for the new capitalist class than for the socialists and described its members not very kindly as 'sons of the *Jetztzeit* (here and now) with spectacles for eyes, the only result of their thoughts the cigar between their bestial lips'. This meant that he was really no friend of his time and that in spite of the success which came to him in old age he was a stranger in it. He belonged to the old school, a cultivated aristocrat who read Greek and Latin as easily as German, and who liked to quote Aristotle, Horace and Cicero. Arthur Schopenhauer was one of the last of his kind, doomed to die out in the industrial, democratic age.

Let us not rashly make him into a misanthrope. He did not believe that nations could rule themselves, but, like Voltaire, wanted them to have the most benevolent, most enlightened government possible. He warmly applauded measures like the abolition of slavery in the British Empire. He hated the Catholic Church, the 'Papist fury', as a force of spiritual oppression and brutalization; in that the old man was a son of the eighteenth century. Nevertheless he was a Christian and distinguished between two basic tendencies in Christianity: an optimistic one promising paradise on earth, which he regarded as Jewish in origin, and an ascetic one proclaiming the misery and treachery

of this world, teaching resignation and compassion. Something of this, which he found best expressed in the pantheism of the Indians, is present in his own work, and that is why a man who hated politics and modern society, a Christian communist like Leo Tolstoy, looked up to Schopenhauer as his master.

In the fifties he was eagerly read by the German middle class; after the disappointments of 1848 people were receptive to his ideas. But he deserves to be read even today, independently of the historical situation. Not because he offers the truth, for no one offers it. A philosophical writer, who despises history and political and social action, must be said to fall short in some respects. But Marx also fell short, he too disregarded certain values of human existence. To despise the contemplative attitude because it is not active would be as foolish as to take the opposite view. What matters is seriousness of purpose. Schopenhauer's philosophy is great art and has the truth of art. One might add that it is German art, though its creator was completely cold towards the demand for a German nation state; he felt happy in the old-fashioned Free City of Frankfurt and liked to associate with Englishmen. Yet he wrote more beautiful and forceful German than anybody who came after him; from the depths of German tradition, mysticism, romanticism and music came the moods which he skilfully combined into the four movements of his great symphony. Outside Germany his influence was greater than that of any other German philosopher – unless we count Marx among the philosophers. This he owed to his style, being for once a philosopher who could be read with pleasure. He owed it also to his profound psychological insight which discovered the sub-conscious long before Sigmund Freud, and to his unique position in the intellectual life of his time. In the age of politics, growing capitalism and rising nation-states he fought a rearguard action for true philosophy, and he fought it well.

8. Prussian Interlude

As late as the second half of the nineteenth century the monarch could still play a decisive role in Germany. He was not only the symbol of an epoch which ended ceremoniously with his death but his character could influence the life of the country. In the years before 1840 people had looked forward expectantly to the death of the King of Prussia. And because his successor, Frederick William IV, had been such a disappointment they breathed an even bigger sigh of relief at his departure than at his arrival. Frederick William's latent insanity became so obvious in 1857 that it could no longer be disguised. His brother, the Prince of Prussia, who deputized for the King, became head of the state with the title of Prince Regent after another year of fruitless delay.

For a long time Prince William was thought to be more reactionary than his brother. Before 1848 his enemies had called him the 'Russian', in 1849 the 'grapeshot prince'. In the fifties he developed a distinct aversion to the corrupt practices of the reactionary government, the infringements of the law and the official hypocrisy. During the Crimean War he sympathized with the western powers. There was a time when the members of the camarilla and the *Kreuzzeitung* nicknamed his family 'the democratic family'; a description which badly overshot the mark. The ageing heir to the throne lacked almost all the qualities of a democrat. But he was a man of honour by his lights, level-headed, practical and of simple piety; he tried to keep his word if it was possible to do so without too much sacrifice. He possessed sympathetic qualities, gallantry, reticence and gratitude; and his education was none the worse because it was strongly influenced by France and because this man, who was born in the eighteenth century, still interspersed his German with French phrases. The concepts in which he thought came from the past; the dim and distant past, if one looks closely. He saw the officials of the state as the King's servants, and the King as the man on horseback, the commander of the army, the master. The army

was his, not the state's, and even the state was his in the last resort. The climax of his life was, as three thousand years earlier, in battle, in knightly victory, in conquest, increasing his glory. Hence the two things which he thought he understood were the army and foreign policy. The notion that an industrial society wanted to exist for itself, not for the state and the armour-clad, royal Christian knight, was far beyond him. He wanted to respect the constitution, not because he liked it but because the King must stand by his sacred word, even if it related to a tiresome and useless craze. 'I shall not examine whether constitutions are salutary,' he remarked. 'But where they exist they must be upheld and not distorted by artificial interpretations.' In his first speech from the throne to parliament he proclaimed these principles: 'Kingship by the grace of God, adherence to law and constitution, loyalty of the people and of the triumphant army, justice, truth, faith and fear of God.' In his simplicity he believed in such concepts and thought that they were enough to master the problems of the age. Wherein he was wrong.

When he came to the throne at the age of sixty the nation, not only Prussia, looked to him with hopeful confidence. The feeling prevailed that, if by different means, the great objective of 1848 would after all be achieved with the help of the old man who in 1849 had been so busy suppressing the revolution. A 'new era' – this was the popular expression – had dawned. Indeed William spoke of 'moral conquests' to be made in Germany, and of the protection of the law by Prussia, a reference to constitutional infringements by some small German states. He appointed a liberal government; and the newly elected Prussian parliament was also overwhelmingly though narrowly liberal. The best-known democratic politicians had purposely refused to stand in order not to frighten the new ruler who promised so much. But when the Prince Regent stressed the 'rigid limits set by me' within which Prussian politics must move, he soon learned that no ruler, constitutional or absolute, can set such limits. The first year of his reign brought a new European crisis for which his programme had made no provision.

9. The Unification of Italy

The Italian War of 1859 – France and Piedmont against Austria – was a consequence of the Crimean War; it was the second in that chain of curiously limited, quick passages-at-arms in which Europe in twenty years accomplished by force what it had been unable to accomplish freely and nobly in 1848. Napoleon III, always anxious to keep the world in turmoil, to make old dreams come true and to acquire new prestige, was again the instigator of the affair. He did not, however, profit from it and was certainly not the living force behind it; this was Italian. The urge to be free from antiquated Austrian rule and from the small local despots who depended on Austria was now very strong in Italy. Because the astute Prime Minister of the King of Sardinia and Piedmont successfully identified his state with the general cause which he persuaded the Emperor of the French to adopt, this particular outbreak took the form of a war between states, started according to the rules of diplomacy.

✓ One is often told that war is a struggle of ideas, of democracy against autocracy, of pacifism against aggression, of conservatism against revolution, of good against evil. Reality, however, rarely corresponds to such propaganda-fed notions. What was the war of 1859? Was it an attack of the revolutionary party system on good law concerned only with its defence? France and Sardinia had attacked, Austria defended the treaties of 1815, the *status quo*. Was it a war of land-hungry France against a German state, a Bonapartist war that had begun on the Po but would end on the Rhine? That Louis Napoleon was anxious to regain France's 'natural frontiers' was an open secret. Or was it a just war of liberation of the Italian people in which the Germans, who were in a similar position and who longed for the same changes, must take Italy's side, even if Italy was allied with the devil? It was possible to regard the war in that light. A passionate controversy developed in Germany over how the war should be seen and what should be done; and thanks to the 'new era' there was complete freedom of discussion. The controversy cut across parties and

groups. The Prince Regent of Prussia, who as a young man had taken part in the War of Liberation against Napoleon, could imagine nothing better than a return of that great period. He was not in the least interested in Italy's freedom and had no intention whatsoever of giving Prussia the part in Germany which Piedmont now set out to play in Italy. He was supported by the old Prussian conservatives, as well as by the Catholic leaders in northern and southern Germany who championed Austria and the threatened temporal rule of the Pope. Of the men of 1848, liberals or democrats, émigrés or stay-at-homes, some were for Austria and a popular war against Bonaparte, others for France or at least for an armed neutrality which was bound to favour Italy. From London Marx and Engels sought to clear up the quarrel, but in spite of their penetrating analyses even they failed to do so. They spoke with contempt of Austria and with hatred of Napoleon, whose overthrow they regarded as the first prerequisite for the revolution. In practice the policy of the world revolution therefore coincided momentarily with that of the 'grape-shot prince'. Lassalle, on the other hand, in a brilliantly written pamphlet described Austria as the real enemy of Italian, German and all freedom. Austria must be torn to shreds, dismembered, destroyed and crushed. Once Europe was freed from the Habsburg curse the German principalities would cease to exist of their own accord, Prussia would no longer be Prussia, and a free German Reich would appear as if by magic. If on the other hand the Germans were led into a national war against France the atmosphere of Europe would be poisoned for years to come.

How is it possible that the democrats cannot see that this war would be unimaginably damaging to civilization? Good understanding ... between the two great civilized peoples, the Germans and the French, is the focal point ... of all democratic development and of civilization. ... Once the blood-thirsty tiger of national hatred is roused again from its lair it might happen that for three decades cultural flowering will be blighted, political development obstructed, intellectual confusion made possible, that the door will again be opened to every kind of sinister Machiavellian intrigue, and that the barbarism of conquest and des-

truction will replace internal progress. Such a development would be by far the greatest victory of the reactionary principle since March 1848.

That was Lassalle's opinion.

Everyone saw the future differently from his allies of the moment with whose practical policy he more or less agreed, everyone had something else at heart. One cared about the glory of Prussia, another about German unification, a third about social revolution. We may be passionate advocates of some cause or other and, if we are politicians, we may even be able to achieve something. But we cannot control the consequences of our actions and recommendations, although we think we can. We have our ideas and the God of History has his and he is always stronger; that is the trouble with all large-scale political action. The aim of both Marx and Lassalle was social revolution. Marx wanted to achieve it through international class struggle; he regarded Louis Napoleon both as the most dangerous enemy and as a traitor to the working class. As far as he was concerned the turn of the Habsburgs could come later. Lassalle thought that a substantial part of the revolution was accomplished if nations became free states. In that respect he was more in sympathy than Marx with the humanist, national-democratic movement of the age, particularly that of the Italians; later in fact he visited Garibaldi, the conqueror of southern Italy, to discuss revolutionary tactics. Lassalle with his imaginative, open mind, could negotiate with a variety of people even if he did not share their views or belong to their party; Marx could not and would not do this. It is impossible to say who was right because what actually happened neither of them, nor indeed anyone else, had foreseen.

For the moment the German hair-splitting was brought to a sudden stop. Louis Napoleon feared the intervention of Prussia, particularly as the Prince Regent had mobilized his army on the Rhine and spoke of armed mediation. Francis Joseph feared the price that Prussia would demand for its help. Consequently the two autocrats took a personal decision and made peace after a campaign of three months. Austria gave up Lombardy, which was united with Piedmont, but was allowed to keep Venetia,

thereby demonstrating its determination to remain an Italian power. A venture with unpredictable consequences was suddenly stopped; once again it had been conducted as though Germany did not exist.

Nevertheless the Italian national movement continued. The one push which Napoleon had given it was enough to give it momentum of its own. In the small central Italian states the people drove away the princes, most of them helpless foreigners; the unification of these states was proclaimed and confirmed by plebiscites. This was the age of the plebiscite, of the consultation of the people on matters already decided, so that only obstinate characters voted no. Then came Garibaldi's journey to Sicily, the revolt of Naples and the entry there of Piedmontese troops. In the spring of 1861 Victor Emmanuel of Savoy took the title of King of Italy and with this act his Kingdom of Sardinia and Piedmont ceased to exist.

The establishment of the Kingdom of Italy was an event unprecedented in European politics. It was not the restoration of a state that had existed before, because since time immemorial there had not been a state of Italy. Victor Emmanuel himself said that Italy was no longer the country of the ancient Romans nor Italy of the Middle Ages, but 'Italy of the Italians'. It was the nation-state which revolutionary theory had demanded and the establishment of which Austria had repeatedly fought to prevent. If the Italians had managed to achieve this, or almost to achieve it – Venice and Rome, the capital, were still outside the Kingdom – why should not other peoples manage it, for example the Germans? And this was the lesson: they had achieved it not as envisaged by revolutionary enthusiasts like Mazzini but by a highly original combination of planned military diplomacy and unplanned, enthusiastic improvisation. Camillo Cavour, Sardinia's great Prime Minister, was no democrat, still less a demagogue, and not even a fanatic advocate of the unity of all Italy. He was merely a liberal who wanted free, secular education, science and industry, a strong active state controlled and stimulated by parliament, parties, a free press, freedom of thought and freedom of ownership. These objectives he achieved in Pied-

mont before he ventured into foreign policy, into the liberation of northern Italy from foreign rule. For this end he did not disdain to form an alliance with Bonaparte, whom he had good reason to distrust; and for the time being he had no intention of going beyond this end. The rest happened by itself, 'from below'. What was admirable was the manner in which those two movements, Cavour's liberal, diplomatic and military movement and Garibaldi's radical, democratic and national one, joined forces. The result was the liberal Kingdom – which was, however, to have a less happy future than its foundation might have suggested.

10. Nationalverein and Fortschrittspartei

The comparison between Prussia and Piedmont was obvious and soon became a commonplace. This did not please the Prince Regent, who issued a statement saying that Sardinia's choice of the road of revolution was one of which his government must express strong disapproval. Cavour replied that before long Prussia would be grateful for his example.

But even if Prussia had had a Cavour, the comparison between the two states was at best as true as it was false. Both the Germans and the Italians longed for unity. Both were thwarted by Habsburg Austria and both had potential leaders, one in Turin and one in Berlin. That was as far as the parallel went. In some respects the material unification of Italy was much more difficult than that of Germany because the internal geographical, educational and economic differences and the diversities of human character were much greater in Italy than in Germany. Sicily and Lombardy were two different worlds, Baden and Saxony were not. In Italy on the other hand Austria was the enemy, the foreigner, whereas in Germany it was a venerable German power; the Italians referred to their oppressors not as 'the Austrians' but as 'the Germans'. In Italy Austria had almost no

friends whereas it had many in Germany, probably still more than Prussia. The German states were not rotten as Modena, Parma and the Papal States had been at the end. Bavaria was not Naples; Berlin was not full of thousands of Bavarian refugees as Turin had been full of thousands of Neapolitan ones. And finally Prussia was not Piedmont, being more important and less popular, less harmless; its strongest, almost its only political traditions provided a warning against the alliance which Piedmont had formed with liberalism.

Nevertheless there had always been a close, mysterious relationship between the fates of the two nations. Now, amid the applause of the British, the Americans and the non-Catholic part of France, the Italians achieved their nation state. Could Germany lag behind?

The German *Nationalverein* (National Association), founded in the autumn of 1859, was an echo of the Italian organization of the same name. Liberals and democrats joined forces 'to promote the unification and free development of the German fatherland', as they had already done with varying degrees of enthusiasm in the last months of the Frankfurt National Assembly, and, now as then, they put their hopes in Prussia. 'The aims of Prussian policy are largely the same as those of Germany. The German federal governments will, however, have to make sacrifices for the whole, if Germany is to have a more concentrated constitution . . .' The Association was only a qualified success and its membership was confined primarily to northern Germany. It was compelled to accept the advantages of the particularism which it hoped to overcome. None of the big states, not even Prussia, tolerated the Association within its frontiers. Finally it established its headquarters in Coburg-Gotha, where the Duke, a relative who shared the views of Queen Victoria and her husband, fancied himself as a national liberal.

Of more immediate significance was the foundation in Prussia of the *Fortschrittspartei* (Progress Party) as the result of a split among the liberals. It attracted those representatives of the people who, after three years of regency, thought that the ministers of the 'New Era' could be a little quicker about making

their promises come true. The programme of the Progress Party was purely liberal, urging that the constitution should be taken more seriously than was done by the reactionary civil service and asking for a more equitable distribution of taxes, particularly for the abolition of the exemption from tax on real estate enjoyed by lords of the manor; the party also advocated closer parliamentary control of the budget, reform of the upper house (whose veto had so far killed all of the government's attempts at liberalization), savings in military expenditure, freedom of trade, and so on. Originally the party was to have been christened the 'Democratic Party'. However, at the suggestion of the electrical engineer, inventor and industrialist, Werner Siemens, it was decided to call it the 'Progress Party' because, as Siemens says in his memoirs, 'it seemed to me that the name of the party should indicate its line of activity rather than its opinions'. Though the new party counted at least one democrat with a strong social conscience among its founders, namely Schulze-Delitzsch, it anxiously kept away from everything that might be held against it as radicalism. The party was middle class, and middle-class fear of the 'red revolution' was no less than it had been fourteen years earlier. The demand for an equal franchise was suppressed and there was not a single word about the industrial workers, whose interests were after all not identical with those of the middle class. The next elections, however, showed that the Progress Party claimed rightly that it represented the Prussian middle classes. It soon became the strongest party and together with the 'Left Centre' party, with which it had close connections, had an absolute majority in parliament after 1862.

The Progress Party and the National Association both wanted Prussia to pursue a nationalistic policy and Germany to be unified under Prussian leadership. All sections of the middle classes wanted a unified state, a free domestic market, the same commercial legislation everywhere, a single German currency and a merchant fleet under a German flag – all the benefits which the industries of the western powers had long enjoyed and which even the Italian middle classes now began to enjoy. Who would deny that there was also an element of patriotism involved, the

determination to present as dignified a picture to the world as other nations, as well as a collective drive for power. 'The German nation,' the journalist Julius Fröbel wrote in 1859, 'is sick of principles and doctrines, literary greatness and theoretical existence. What it demands is power, power, power. And to the man who offers it power it will offer honour, more honour than he can imagine.'

Once more as in 1849, there was a difference between those who wanted 'greater' Germany and those who did not, between the *Grossdeutsche* and the *Kleindeutsche*. After all, the problem remained basically the same as long as Austria, Prussia and the central states existed. As in 1849, the *Grossdeutsche* were in the majority in southern Germany, among the Catholics, in the small towns and in the countryside. Once more the *Kleindeutsche* were more influential because they knew what they wanted and had the commercial world, as well as the most active part of the academic world, on their side. The *Grossdeutsche* were less single-minded; their aims were made up of a mixture of conflicting wishes, ideas and dreams. Among the *Grossdeutsche* there were Bavarian aristocrats who would have liked to stop the course of history because all was well as it was and should remain so; there were Suabian democrats who distrusted Prussia; socialists who wished Habsburgs, Wittelsbachs and Hohenzollerns to the devil, and princes who hoped to save more of their sovereignty in a 'greater' Germany than in 'little' Germany; there were nationalists to whom the nation-state seemed an ugly cripple without the German Austrians, and profound political philosophers who condemned the principle of the nation-state and regarded its application to central Europe as a misfortune. Konstantin Frantz was one of these and what he said about the Federation of the German peoples and the small peoples around Germany, about European federalism, moral order and social community, was well said. If everything had happened as he imagined, how happy we should all be today. But Frantz was a political philosopher, not a statesman. He only had ideas and did nothing to put them into practice, nor could he show how, given the situation, they could be realized. The Prussian nut was

not the only one that could not be cracked with philanthropic dreams; Austria too had demonstrated recently that it had little sympathy for voluntary, magnanimous changes by its stubborn determination to hold on to Venice, its last purely Italian province, by basing itself on the dead letter of old robber agreements.

Today the writers who in those fateful ten years objected to the principle of the nation-state are read with admiration. They prophesied many dreadful happenings which later came true. Konstantin Frantz was one of them; Lord Acton, the great Anglo-German historian, and Jacob Burckhardt, the Swiss art historian, were others. Acton said that nationalism was against the law of God because it worshipped something natural or biological, race or a collection of human beings identifiable only by a common language. It destroyed historical evolution, destroyed European civilization, divided the peoples, set them against each other and was likely to culminate in an orgy of barbaric mutual destruction. Burckhardt, who knew Italian history and art, marvelled at the 'enormous mistake' of his beloved, idyllic Italy now becoming a commonplace state like others, that all the magnificent old cities and republics, the tremendous memories, Rome, Venice, Florence and a hundred others, should unite to become a would-be great power, at best only a caricature of France. It is easy to understand the patrician scholar's shock. In history the old is sacrificed for the new. In this case the new was as yet brash, its value unproven and its dangers obvious: the nation-state abounded in contradictions. The liberals preached freedom but the result of their efforts was to make the state omnipotent. They glorified the nation, the good, the infallible people, though in reality they distrusted the masses and represented the interests of the well-to-do who were only a small minority. They incited people but, like the Prussian Prince Regent, wished to confine their revolution to strict limits, with the result that they were afraid even of universal suffrage. Their religion was superficial and inadequate; Christian but lacking in seriousness, it knew nothing of evil, it was optimistic and peaceable and at the same time martial, rhetorical and violent. Jacob Burckhardt saw through all this, looked further ahead into a desolate future and

hastily looked away again in order to steep himself in his beloved past. But the Italians could not live on the great memories of the Roman Empire or the glories of the Renaissance. However flourishing their states had been in the fifteenth century, in the middle of the nineteenth they were wretched. They gave men nothing, they only took and obstructed. Because they no longer fulfilled the needs of society they must disappear, and their citizens must organize themselves on a broader basis. But whom should they join? 'Humanity' did not exist in political reality; neither did 'Europe'. The union of all those who at least had the Italian language in common and who felt themselves to be Italians was therefore not so unreasonable, even in terms of practical aims. Nationalism was, of course, not merely a means to an end. It existed, it was an elemental force, an aggregate of feelings, good and bad. A philosopher might deplore it and think out better aims, but unless he was also a prophet who carried men along with him and created the forces needed to achieve his goal he accomplished nothing, however justified his warnings. Nor could oppression solve the problem. For long the police in both Germany and Italy had persecuted nationalism and caused much suffering; but in vain. Nationalism still existed, and having at last achieved its aim in Italy, there could be no doubt that it would soon do the same in Germany. The only question was how. A good politician had to accept this fact and make it into something as moderate, suitable and lasting as possible. The politician must work with the material available. He leaves it to the philosopher to wish that things were different and to think out ways of achieving the highest ideals.

11. Constitutional Conflict

From the beginning the 'New Era' in Prussia had been a confused affair. Prince Regent – since 1861, King – William wanted to rule legally and constitutionally. On paper the constitution

was not a cut-and-dried affair which simply needed to be 'applied'. What it was, how its formal framework corresponded to social reality, was yet to be revealed. In Britain Parliament ruled through its executive committee, the Cabinet, and the King's functions were merely formal and at the most consultative. This parliamentary form of government had emerged as the result of struggles in the dim and distant past. In Austria and France monarchs ruled with the support of army, civil service and church, and the consultative bodies were there for decorative purposes. In Prussia they were to be something slightly better, although it was not clear what. Logically the middle-class liberals ought to have wanted parliamentary government, as they had in 1848. Tamed by defeat, they had meanwhile returned to older concepts of a division of power, as it had existed in pre-absolutist times between prince and estates. Crown and middle-class popular representatives should govern together and complement one another. But such a division did not correspond to the reality of the modern state which had to be one whole. Nor did it correspond to the wishes of the Crown, which basically still wanted to represent the whole, even though, as the King put it, 'surrounded by new, modern institutions'. What the purpose, the power of those institutions would be was bound to emerge as soon as the first serious issue divided the parliamentarians and the prince with his Junker advisers.

Constitutional government – the alleged division of power – was further complicated by the existence of a third partner, the Upper House. Consisting of noble landowners and dignitaries nominated by the King, it represented too obviously the old upper class to enjoy widespread confidence. Technically its co-operation in the government of the country was as necessary as that of the other two factors, Crown and people. It was the reliable ally of the Crown as long as both defended old Junker Prussia. If the government tried to fulfil certain minimum requirements of the modern state demanded by middle-class interests, the Upper House could frustrate the intentions of the Crown as successfully as those of the Lower House. The King's only remedy was to copy the English practice of creating as many

new peers as were needed to ensure the adoption of a piece of legislation. By that method the Junkers' exemption from taxation on real estate was abolished in 1861. But the conflict which was about to begin concerned the Crown and the Lower House alone.

The Prussian army was in need of reform – a fact which had emerged on the occasion of the mobilizations of 1850 and 1859. The number of recruits had not risen since 1815 although the population of the state had almost doubled. Conscription existed therefore on paper only. However, those who were called up not merely served actively for two years and belonged to the reserve for another two, but they were then still liable to be called up as members of the 'first levy' of the *Landwehr* in case of war. As a result middle-aged family men went to war while young men remained at home – an impossible situation. In addition, politically, or from the point of view of the army leadership morally, there was something wrong with the *Landwehr*. The *Landwehr* man belonged to the middle class, he was an elector, a man whose civilian activity alienated him from the army, and his officers also belonged to the middle class. He did not belong as completely to his supreme commander as the regular soldier. The political argument was not publicly mentioned by those who planned the reform which was now initiated, but the Lower House quickly suspected what they had in mind, and the accuracy of that suspicion can easily be proved by what they said in private. The *Landwehr*, wrote the King's Minister of War, General von Roon, was 'a politically false institution' and in a personal letter he said: 'In the process of universal disintegration I can recognize only one organism capable of resistance, the army. To preserve it is a task which I still regard as possible, though only for a limited period.' If that was not done Prussia would drift rapidly 'into the muddy ocean of parliamentary rule'. The Regent himself may not have been as conscious of these political motives as his adviser. In any case the reform prepared with his active participation amounted to the dissolution of the first *Landwehr* levy. The plan was to increase the number of annual conscripts by about half, to raise the period of active service to three years, to make

the three youngest age groups of the *Landwehr* part of the reserve and to relegate the older age groups and the second *Landwehr* levy to fortress duties only. The reform, particularly the creation of new regiments, cost money and this expenditure had to be approved by parliament.

There were several things to be said for the technical aspects of the reform. Nor did the liberals deny that the state needed a strong army, particularly when the intention was that in German-speaking Europe it should pursue the constructive, progressive policy which it had so far failed to pursue, but which the left desired. Even in the second half of the twentieth century we do not seem to have advanced beyond the old idea that a proper state must have a proper army, at least as good as that of its neighbours. The idea was certainly not questioned in 1861. 'If we are attacked we defend ourselves', Engels had written in 1859. How could Prussia or Germany defend itself against the great armies of France or Russia if it did not have an equally good, modern army? In the struggle for power one nation outbid the other. As populations and industries grew, armies had to grow too. The question was, who would control the new army, whose brain-child would it be?

For the King and his political generals, Roon, Alvensleben and Edwin von Manteuffel, the answer was clear. The army must remain a reliable instrument in the hand of the monarch. It must be a mass army because the age demanded it, but it must strengthen the position of the Crown and not that of democracy. The army must be the real Prussian state, as of old, and the King must be the soldier-king. As long as that was the position there was no harm in allowing the middle class to play at parliament. Roon went further; he wanted to have none of the 'constitutional humbug' and hoped to achieve just that in the course of the approaching conflict. Honest William did not go so far.

It is better to believe in something than to believe in nothing, and Albrecht von Roon, was a man of principle, a Lutheran of the old kind. Words like duty, fatherland, obedience and king meant to him the essence of all that was true, alive and sacred.

His Christianity was of the militant, not of the charitable variety; he had worked out exactly how to suppress with an iron fist the resistance of the capital, Berlin. 'The action,' he remarked, 'by which demands from the Crown are won is usually fought with guns and swords, not with the pen.' He possessed a trait often found in German conservatives: he thought highly of the moral character of those who shared his views but condemned his opponents for depravity, corruption, cleverness and sophistry, all of which were aired in the 'drivel shop' of parliament which, as an institution, served no other purpose. Once that rabble was dispersed the real Prussian people, as it was still to be found in the countryside, could certainly be brought to heel. The arrogant conviction that his own cause and his alone was right made Roon and his friends indulge in unsoldierly intrigues. How could a just man err in the service of his King? After all, though the general had read Hegel in his youth, he was no sociologist; that new field he left to the liberals. It never occurred to Roon that the process which he regarded as decay was a development of the social structure and as inevitable as a process of nature. Nor could he grasp that there must be corresponding political changes, that no God could preserve or resurrect the Prussia of Frederick William I and that any such attempt, however apparently successful, could result only in unnatural contortions. All the things that his new army needed, strategic railways, mobile bridges to cross the enemy's rivers, artillery and ammunition in hitherto unknown quantities, pharmaceutical products of all kinds, all these must be produced for him by classes which did not exist in the good old days, by miners, steelworkers, chemists and engineers, entrepreneurs and bankers. Yet Roon saw no connection between this fact and the political difficulties in which he found himself. How otherwise could he have proceeded with such bold, provocative confidence?

The Lower House was the parliament of the 'New Era', liberal but moderate to the point of throwing away its own weapons. It expected great things from the new era; as it received almost nothing it became impatient. One manifestation of this impatience was the formation of the Progress Party in the

summer of 1861; now the Lower House became involved in the army reform.

Lassalle wrote to Marx: 'The law is shameful. In a word its purpose is the dissolution – complete, albeit disguised – of the *Landwehr* as the last democratic survival of 1810 and the creation of a powerful weapon for absolutism and the Junkers.' Although the liberals would have used somewhat more moderate language, on the whole they agreed. They rejected the bill and insisted on the division between *Landwehr* and line, as well as on a two-year term of service. Meanwhile, being sensible men, they voted an extraordinary grant to keep the army in good condition in view of the critical international situation. Thereupon the King and his minister immediately began to carry out the projected reform, convinced that once 189 new battalions and squadrons existed, a vote of the chamber could no longer remove them.

This irritated the deputies. In the second year the military budget was passed only by a very small majority, and at the beginning of the third year members demanded that in future they should be given a detailed statement of the various items so that they would know for what they were voting. The King, still inclined to play the role of the constitutional monarch, though annoyed by the obstinacy of the people's representatives, and much more under the influence of his intriguing generals than he himself realized, was persuaded to dismiss most of his liberal ministers and to replace them by reactionary officials; that was the end of the 'New Era'. The chamber was dissolved; perhaps the King and his advisers hoped to create a more obedient assembly by resorting to the old trick of pressure from the authorities; or perhaps they wanted to irritate both sides and produce a crisis; a crisis was not slow in coming. A bigger poll than the Kingdom of Prussia had ever seen or would ever see again proved the electorate's excitement. The Progress Party had an overwhelming majority in the new chamber, whereas the conservatives were reduced to ten members. 'What next?' asked the Minister of War. 'There is no party that can govern. The democrats are out of the question, of course, but the great

majority consists of democrats and those who want to become democrats . . . No party can rule in these circumstances except the democrats, yet they cannot and must not.' Who could rule, then, and how, without blowing the constitution sky high?

One does not get the impression that the government prepared a precise plan. The King wanted, if possible, both to have his own way, and to preserve the reputation of being an honest man who kept his constitutional oath. The generals wanted a *coup d'état*. In the cabinet there were still some politically shrewd members who did not think it possible to rule the country without a budget approved by parliament, without a semblance of constitutionalism. Roon himself vacillated; in the critical weeks of September 1862 he was not the man of iron he so much liked to appear. The parliamentary majority on the other hand was dominated by those who wanted nothing more than a compromise, any compromise as long as it confirmed their right to have at least a say in military matters. The new army was there and the amalgamation of *Landwehr* and line was a *fait accompli*. Perhaps it might at least be possible to save the minor point of two-year service and thus gain a partial parliamentary victory? When William refused even this the Lower House rejected the government's bill by 308 votes to 11, provided nothing for army reform in the budget, and thus presented the government with the choice of sending the new regiments home or of ruling without a budget.

Everybody to whom the rule of law mattered realized that ruling without a budget amounted to governing in contravention of the constitution. A reactionary newspaper tried to come to the rescue by advancing the theory that, whereas the constitution laid down that the Lower House, the Upper House and the Crown must jointly prepare the budget, it omitted to say what should happen if the three failed to agree. This '*lacuna* theory' was a juridical joke which the cabinet itself did not dare to take seriously. During the last 150 years Britain had evolved a procedure to be followed in such circumstances which the latest European constitutions had copied: the new government was formed from the majority in the chamber. This meant the parlia-

mentary form of government which was no less distasteful to the King than to von Roon. William found himself unable to move forwards or backwards. He could not move forwards because, although his military prompters had made the necessary preparations for suppressing a rising in Berlin, there was no sign of any such rising and guns were of no use against the chamber's insistence on its rights. Moreover, his most important ministers, the Foreign Minister and the Minister of Finance, resigned because they felt themselves unable to carry out their duties against the will of the chamber; the stubborn old King was more determined than ever not to give way. He had expert knowledge which led him to believe that a three-year term of service was an absolute minimum, given the professional armies of France and Russia. A gathering of civilians, of his subjects, was hardly likely to know more about the matter than he, the King and soldier. The vocal conservatives of the *Kreuzzeitung* issued warnings that Prussia had become great as a military state and that it must remain faithful to its inner law or go under. The King shared these sentiments. He had wanted to rule decently and lawfully, even to respect the constitution like a toy which it had unfortunately become necessary to concede to the *Zeitgeist*. But that the day would come when political parties, gesticulating phrasemongers, democrats, Catholics, Poles and Jews would be prescribing to him how the Prussian army should look in future – that he had not imagined. If that was the new age, then there was no place in it for him and it would be better if he resigned. Let his son – who was engaged in the usual crown-princely opposition to his father and had a liberal English wife – come to grips with the Progress Party as best he could. The King drafted a ceremonial instrument of abdication.

We should not over-emphasize the historical importance of the decision at stake. Prussia's social structure and its characteristics, the spirit of the officer corps, of the aristocracy, of the churches, of the civil service and of the middle class itself would not have been changed by one dramatic defeat of the monarchy. The population was still overwhelmingly royalist, whatever way it voted. In 1859 Lassalle wrote to Marx: 'After ten years away

from here you seem to have no idea at all how monarchist our people are.' The embittered withdrawal of the old King who had hopefully embarked on his task only four years earlier would have affected people; some members of the Lower House might have been moved to tears and the parties would have become more willing still to make concessions. Nevertheless, in Prussia's new, uncertain constitutional life William I's abdication would have been a serious event, a clearly visible, solemn sign that the age of the soldier kings was past and that it was not the King or the Upper House or the generals on whom the burden of responsibility rested, but the citizens. Who can tell how such an event would have affected the sense of power and responsibility of the middle classes, or Prussia's relations with Germany, or Germany's relations with the non-German world?

The King did not abdicate. Instead the papers announced on the evening of 23 September 1862 that the Prussian Minister in Paris, von Bismarck-Schönhausen, had been appointed Minister of State and acting Chairman of the Cabinet.

Part Six

Prussia Conquers Germany (1861-1871)

The man who now stepped on to the political stage played a unique part in modern German history. There is no other instance in the development of western Europe of one figure who changed a nation's destiny. Certainly not in Britain, where everything took a more natural, normal course; even France has nothing comparable to offer. Napoleon I, however meteoric his career, was only an episode; when it was over France returned to its mapped-out historical road. There remained the French administrative system, completed but not invented by Napoleon, and the legend of military glory, extremism and sudden collapse. Russian history knows of a man who in the second decade of our century took personal action that was fraught with unforeseeable consequences. Lenin, though he imagined himself merely to be carrying out what was known to be scientifically right and inevitable, was himself an historical force. The Communist revolution which he believed himself to be serving was invented, forced through and led by him. Bismarck was no such force, and knew it, being basically modest. The forces which he harnessed were there already: the determination to rule of the old, upper-class Prussian nascent industrialism, nationalism, liberalism, democracy and materialism. Bismarck provided the form which gave them cohesion. In the end they broke through this form, as Bismarck in his last years recognized that they would. Yet even the manner in which they outgrew first him and then his successors was in part determined by the pressure which he had exerted on them for thirty years. Everything that he had tried to prevent or to delay, the worst that he feared, happened in the end: world wars, world revolution, the literal destruction of the state which he idolized,

with the result that the younger generation growing up today hardly knows the name of Prussia. Moreover, this happened not so very long after his death. People who knew him well actually experienced it; for example the wife of his son, who poisoned herself in 1945 a few hours before soldiers of the Red Army reached the family castle. A fate which serves to illustrate the futility of all political endeavour. Or should we say the futility of false, unjust and in the last resort unnatural political endeavour? Our story must seek to answer this question, although there will not be a clear yes or no.

I. Bismarck's Portrait

The son of a nobleman from the Mark of Brandenburg, Bismarck belonged to an old, well-known, reasonably well-to-do family from east of the Elbe. His mother came from the professional classes, the daughter of a civil servant and the grand-daughter and great-grand-daughter of professors. As an old man Bismarck said that he was not really a member of the Prussian nobility and that, because of his mother, the Junkers had never really accepted him. There is some truth in this claim. Bismarck embarrassed his unsophisticated rural neighbours by his intelligence, wit, elegance of expression and choice of reading matter, as well as by an inclination to indulge in wild, unexpected action. Even as a young man he made fun of the way of life of his class as something to which he himself was far superior. On the other hand, he liked to act the simple country squire who preferred horses and trees to the artificial wealth of cities – only to betray the split in his nature by his penetrating mode of expression. To a liberal politician he said: 'I am a Junker and want to take advantage of it', a remark which no ordinary Junker would have made. Once, as a young member of parliament, he threatened that the rural population would teach the revolutionary, corrupt cities obedience, 'even if they wiped them off the face of the earth'. Often, particularly in

his younger years, he demonstrated what amounted to almost a caricature of brash class arrogance, calling all bourgeois politicians to the 'left' of him 'tailors', and being scornful at finding himself sitting next to the wife of a businessman at a diplomatic dinner. In exaggerating his Junker characteristics and consciously acting the hunting and shooting squire and soldier he was at the same time expressing part of his true nature. He probably owed his culture, intelligence, ambition, worldliness and business acumen to his mother's side of the family. But the qualities that integrated his talents, the strength, the willpower and brutality of which he was capable, the insatiable acquisitiveness concerned less with money than with land and forests, were part of the Bismarck nature. To present him as an intellectual disguised as a baron would be oversimplifying his complex character. He was really a creature of the country, fond of forests and animals, and his basic views of man and society remained influenced to the end of his days by the rural, patriarchal impressions of his youth. In any case, the question of what Bismarck inherited from his father's or from his mother's side has only limited meaning. His brother Bernhard was an ordinary country squire, a fact which shows that genius comes from out of the blue.

Bismarck was tall and, though slim in his youth, later became fat because he ate and drank enormous quantities, thus giving his expressive round eyes the moist brilliance induced by alcohol. He had a high-pitched, soft voice, unexpected in a man of his bulk. In public he spoke haltingly, searching for words. He despised good speakers, and later used to say to his parliamentary enemies: 'You like to speak, you enjoy speaking. For you speaking is a profession, for me it is torment.' Yet what he had to say was always interesting, personal and well expressed; the style of his letters and official documents is masterly. He always finds the right word, the striking comparison, the illuminating joke, he knows how to paint landscapes, conjure up moods, define ideas and sum up people – the last usually with more malice than justice. It will always remain true that the style is the man: in whatever a man writes there is his spirit, his will, his soul – everything.

➤ This explains why a close study of Bismarck's writings sometimes

produces a feeling of surprise and even repulsion. The precision of his expression is abrupt, the rhythm of his sentences cold and disciplined. He wrote for readers whom he did not like and rarely even respected. His education was that of a well-bred middle-class child of a highly educated period. The pupils of Prussian grammar schools were made to learn a great deal in those days. Bismarck knew Greek and Latin, wrote French like a Frenchman and English not badly; later he learned Russian. His speech and his writings were liberally interspersed with foreign words, usually French, and illustrated with quotations from Latin, and from Shakespeare and Schiller, of both of whom he was very fond. However, he only read what interested him or what could be of use to him. He never, even as a rich man, collected a real library, and his houses were said to have been furnished without taste. German literature of his own age was a closed book to him, even when it again became well worth reading towards the end of the century. Being intelligent himself, he enjoyed the company of intelligent people – of Jewish journalists for example – but was forced by circumstances of class and occupation to associate mainly with people of limited horizon.

From the days of his youth he was conscious of a powerful ambition, and with it the ability to satisfy it, and he was only in his early thirties when politics became his dominating interest. Yet it would be wrong to say that it was his only interest because he was no fanatic, no ascetic. In spite of his public duties he always managed to enjoy family life. He had a happy relationship with his wife, although by all accounts Johanna von Bismarck had little distinction. Such private traits distinguish him from Napoleon, and also from Lenin, the other two political giants with whom he is sometimes compared. He also had a sense of humour and an ability to mock at himself. Although endowed with strong instincts he knew himself well and said that there were corners in his soul into which he had never allowed others to look.

Although as a young man he was attracted by the fashionable free-thinking of the age, shortly before his marriage he returned to the faith of his fathers. It was a natural, inborn faith, not that of a convert. He often read the Bible and in the great crises of his

life carried edifying texts around with him, interpreting their exhortations to fit his situation. Much has been made of the contradiction between his Christian beliefs and his political practices, the lies, the cynical tricks, the wars for which he was responsible and the cruelty with which he put an end to many a career. He himself was aware of this contradiction without condemning it. In his view there was a difference between private and public behaviour; the craftsman's technique was prescribed by his material, and the politician who was responsible for the well-being of a state must not measure his actions by the yardstick of middle-class morality. Over this he parted from the conservative friends of his youth, Professor Stahl and the Gerlach brothers, who denied this difference and preached that political actions must be in accordance with Christian ethics. Yet Bismarck's policy had Lutheran roots which revealed themselves in his hard-heartedness and his respect for law, property, authority and for the God-given differences between occupations and classes, between poor and rich. Luther had demanded that authority should wield a sharp sword, and Bismarck in power followed him in recommending the retention of the death penalty. Even in his old age he remarked to his doctor that as a matter of principle there could be no extenuating circumstances in cases of murder, and that even children who had committed a murder must pay the supreme penalty. But when he approved of the execution of Robert Blum with the words: 'When I have an enemy in my power I must destroy him', he was speaking not as a Lutheran – because Blum was no malefactor – but as a merciless political enemy, a barbarian.

There was something of the barbarian in this man who was a great writer and the noble product of German and European civilization; a nervous barbarian whose massive frame and boldness did not protect him from fits of weeping. He suffered from ailments such as phlebitis, insomnia and nervous pain in the face during most of the time that he was politically active, and made a great deal of fuss about it. When he encountered opposition he suffered from cholecystitis, jaundice and convulsions. In his later years he described the visit of a leading liberal politician as follows: 'I reached such a state of nervous tension that I finally had

to say to him, "Herrr . . . spare me, I am ill." Then I was so annoyed that I could not sleep until seven o'clock in the morning, and I would have shot the man if he had crossed my threshold again . . . ' His hates were even stronger than his loves, and those whom he hated he wished to destroy; sometimes he did so in fact, probably more often in his imagination. If some photographs show him as a grave, imposing personality, there are others in which he looks very unpleasant. Experienced psychologists soon realized that he had an overwhelming thirst for power and would never be content to play second fiddle. Later he could not bear others around him to play any part, merely wanting reliable servants. He admitted himself that he never forgot insults; and in his own mind he was always being insulted and misunderstood, the victim of sinister intrigues. He himself was by no means above intrigue; he enjoyed deceiving and trapping his enemies as much as he did startling, confusing and frightening them with his brutal frankness. His own nobleman's honour was dear to him, unlike that of his partners and opponents, and the fascination of his letters is due partly to the witty but completely unjustified malice of his comments on people; even on the kings of Prussia whom he served, on Frederick William IV, then on Crown Prince Frederick and finally on William II. Only for his real 'master', William I, did he feel loyalty and affection – with a fair admixture of contempt. Throughout his public life he pursued the royal ladies with almost comic hatred, and never got over the fact that they had arts and opportunities of influencing which even the most powerful minister could not acquire. There was much hatred in Bismarck, much impatient, nervous superiority and little love; more love for nature, for animals and trees than for human beings. Nobody can answer the question which is nevertheless worth reflecting upon: to what extent his creations absorbed his characteristics.

This Junker was drawn towards political activity because he felt that he was the right man for it, and that thus he might achieve power and fame. He was drawn too, probably, because he knew that the privileges of his class were threatened and he had no faith in the ability of his uncouth fellow aristocrats to put up a

successful defence. Soon his liking for country life became theory rather than reality because he enjoyed the political hustle and bustle of Berlin. In the United Diet of 1847 he was conspicuous for his audacity, wit and aggressiveness, preparing his speeches with ambitious care. As there was no abundance of such talents among the conservatives he soon became something like a parliamentary leader. He was a frequent visitor at Court and talked politics with the royal princes; convinced he knew how to treat the mob, he would have liked nothing better in March 1848 than to start a counter-revolutionary *coup*. Nothing came of this, but, even after the King had driven through the city wearing the revolutionary colours of national Germany, Bismarck did not give up the Prussian Junker cause. He denounced the Frankfurt Assembly and supported the rights of the landowners in articles in the *Kreuzzeitung*; he helped to found the Conservative Party and intrigued against the liberal governments of the year of revolution, with Frederick William IV's friends and those who had his ear. Bismarck was bold enough severely to reproach the King for his lack of firmness. This impressed Frederick William IV; an upright, intelligent but outspoken subject who merely went a little too far in his loyalty to his King appealed to the monarch's romantic taste. In 1849 we find Bismarck again as a member of the Diet, elected under the three-class franchise, and in 1850 in the assembly of the abortive Prussian 'Union' in Erfurt; he was ever provocative, relishing argument and expressing paradoxical right-wing views with sparkling brilliance. German union, with or without Austria, the principles of the Frankfurt imperial constitution, universal and equal suffrage, no one demolished these with such supreme assurance as the tall, young representative with the high-pitched voice and the goatee. When it became necessary to defend the Treaty of Olmütz, the abandonment of the 'Union', the conservatives put him forward as their strongest gun, and Bismarck-Schönhausen accomplished this delicate task with mastery. The Christian conservatives, the Gerlach brothers and Professor Stahl, regarded him as their man, their friend and pupil. He was not, however, completely their pupil because he was and considered himself superior to them; he was not completely

their friend because he was never a loyal friend in politics. Had they paid more attention they would have noticed sooner that he did not completely share their views. They thought in terms of the old, universal order: Europe, Christianity, monarchy by the grace of God, the alliance of lawfully acting kings which, as Britain existed for itself alone and France was unfortunately in the throes of revolution, must remain limited to the pious rulers of eastern Europe, Russia, Austria and Prussia. That was their interpretation of the Treaty of Olmütz. Bismarck did not speak of Europe and Christianity, nor did he say that war between the conservative powers must be avoided at all costs. War was conceivable, but only if the stakes were worthwhile, not merely for a North German union. 'The only sound basis of a great state – and this distinguishes it intrinsically from a small state – is egoism, not romanticism; it is beneath the dignity of a great state to fight for a cause which lies outside its own interest.' That view had more in common with Machiavelli's ideas than those of Professor Stahl. In 1847, the very first year of his political career, Bismarck had announced: 'One only holds to principles as long as they are not put to the test; when that happens one throws them away, as the peasant throws away his slippers, and one goes barefoot ...' From the start his direct intelligence despised doctrine and speechifying; he wanted to manipulate real power, which in the last resort was always the power to kill. He could certainly discuss, but mainly in order to make fun of discussion; hence the fury which he aroused at parliamentary gatherings while he had the vitality of youth and early manhood. In 1849 he wrote to his wife, 'The German question will not be decided in parliaments but in the sphere of diplomacy and in the field, and all that we say about it and decide has no more value than the romantic dreams of a sentimental youth who builds castles in the air and thinks that some unexpected event might make him into a great man ...' In 1862, in his first week as Prime Minister, he expressed the same thought in words which achieved notoriety. A man's development is a curious thing. Bismarck was certainly capable of development; he changed his policy, his views and judgements over and over again, and at the age of seventy was an incom-

